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WILD FRANK, THE BUCKSKIN BRAVO.

Wild Frank, THE BUCKSKIN BRAVO; OR, LADY LILY'S LOVE.

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BUD BOB" NOVELS, "BOSS BOB," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOUNDED STRANGER'S GIFT.

It was a moonlit night on the vast expanse of rolling country near the Powder river. For mile upon mile it stretched away toward the east in undulating billows divided by tiny valleys, and with not a tree visible to the naked eye.

The night was keenly cold even for the month of December, the air being filled with biting frost, yet clear and pure. The moon, which rode at its full, across the blue vault overhead, bathed the landscape below in a mellow radiance, which made the night nearly as light as the day that had preceded it.

A horseman drew rein upon the crest of a land billow, somewhat higher than its surrounding neighbors, and swept the prairies with his eagle glance, an expression of kindling admiration coming over his browed features.

"It is a beautiful night, ain't it, Bess?" he said, patting his coal black mustang on the neck. "It reminds me of the night old Spotted Tail and his party gave us a whirl, over on the Loup. I wonder if there's any reds around, to-night."

He unslung a field glass from its holster, and gazed long and earnestly through it, sweeping the landscape on every side.

"Nary a varmint, I guess," was his conclusion, as he put up the glass. "I reckon they're off on a raid, somewhere, or else they'd be a-lay-in' for me. Hal hal maybe they're sick of layin' for Wild Frank!"

He chirruped to his horse, and away the faithful mustang galloped, down the hillside and across the valley to the next billow, and away and on like an arrow, so swift he went.

A mile was quickly spent, and Wild Frank was just crossing another ravine or valley, when he heard a peculiar cry. Instantly he reined Black Bess back upon her haunches, and listened, his features growing suddenly stern in their expression. Boy of seventeen summers, though he was, daily experience on the frontier from infancy had taught him the well-known maxim to "look before leaping."

Wild Frank, though young in years, and short in stature, was strong and rugged, and the clear cast of his countenance, and eagle glance of his eye, told better than words that he was a son of the frontier, brave and daring to a fault.

He was clad from chin to toe in buckskin, with a bearskin cloak as cape about his shoulders, and broad brim slouch hat upon a head, whose curling brown hair swept his shoulders.

His weapons consisted of a pair of revolvers and a knife in his belt, and a rifle slung across his back, and this he now unslung, and brought into hand, as he drew rein.

"Sh! Bess—be quiet," he said, softly. "It wasn't no animal that give that yelp. Maybe there are reds in the vicinity. Listen!"

They did listen, the mustang as well as her rider, and were soon rewarded.

Along moaning cry came floating to them on the crisp breeze—came from a clump of alder bushes that grew in the ravine, but a few yards away.

"There! I know'd it wasn't an animal ki-yi!" Wild Frank said. "Nor it ain't an Indian as some of that peep. I opine I'd best investigate."

He guided Black Bess close to the thicket, and dismounted. Parting the shrubbery, he peered into a sort of clearing that had been made in the center, by the use of a knife.

Here a scene was revealed to his gaze, that sent a thrill of sympathy through his heart, and a chill of horror to attack him.

Lying upon the ground, partly supported on his elbow, was a man, with a full beard and unkempt hair—with baggy eyes and features, the latter bloody from flesh wounds.

Beside this stranger was a little girl some two years old—a pretty little thing she was, with sunny hair, and fast asleep with her little head pillowed against the man's breast.

"Thank God!" the wounded stranger uttered, as he saw Wild Frank. "I was afraid it was an Indian coming to finish me."

"But, it ain't, you see," the young scout replied. "What's the matter? Don't you?"

The stranger nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Yes, I am wounded beyond repair," he replied, sorrowfully. "The Indians gave me a chase, and I escaped to this covert, but not until they gave me a bullet in my side to remember them by. It don't bleed externally, but I am fast filling up inside, and cannot last much longer."

"Well, this is too bad, sure enough," Wild Frank said. "Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Yes, there is," the stranger answered, glancing at the child, piteously. "I have not many minutes to live, and I must leave my little girl alone on a pitiless world. God knows how I have suffered for the past few hours in fear that I should die ere I could make any provision for her, and she would be left alone here upon the prairies to die from starvation. Oh! my boy, you surely will not let my innocent babe come to that! Tell me that you will not!"

"You can bet I won't, stranger! I don't know much about babies, to be sure, for we never had many up at our ranch, but I'll take the little one if you say so, and do the best I know how. Them as knows Wild Frank, will tell you he never let even a dog want for grub."

"God bless you, my boy. Take her, and call her Myrtle. Care for her tenderly; teach her to revere her God, and He will bless you for it. She has no mother, poor baby, and soon will have no father. Oh! it is a bitter cup I have quaffed!"

And tears trickled down over the face of the wounded father, fast.

"There, don't grieve, my friend," Wild Frank said, kneeling beside him. "I ain't much versed in the matter, but there's them as says there's peace and happiness in the world beyond this. I'll take your gal, and see that it is cared for. Here. Kiss it, and I'll take it out where it can have a better bed upon my blankets."

He tenderly raised the child so that the dying man could kiss it; then the latter drew a tiny ebony box from his pocket, and pressed it into the young scout's hand.

"Take that," he said, "and always keep it with you. If ever any question arises that you want to know who Myrtle really is, you will find the necessary proof in that box."

Wild Frank accordingly shoved it into his hunting sack, and then carried the babe from the thicket. Laying it upon the grass, he carefully arranged a bed out of blankets, upon his mustang's back. Placing his protegee upon this, he strapped her down so that she could not fall off—then leaving his mustang to graze, he returned to the thicket dell.

A change had taken place.

The stranger was outstretched, prone upon the earth, rigid in limb and feature, and with blood oozing from his mouth and nose.

One pitying glance, then the young buckskin knight turned and retraced his steps to his horse.

CHAPTER II.

A WIFE'S UNFAITHFULNESS.

Two men met upon the streets of London, and paused, with a nod of recognition, the one of the two extending his hand, which the other man took with seeming reluctance.

"Good-evening, Sir Ralph!" the elder man said, cordially. "Just through your duties at the bank, eh?"

"I am, your lordship," Sir Ralph replied, rather stiffly, and in surprise that he should be hailed upon the thoroughfare by the moneyed aristocrat, Lord Mt. Morey. "I left the office but a few moments ago."

"So I inferred you would, and strolled this way to intercept you. Step over to my office, Revere, for I have something of importance to tell you."

"At your request, my lord, I will do so," Sir Ralph responded, his words and tone indicating that he would much rather decline than accept the invitation.

Nevertheless he did not refuse his lordship's arm, and the two sauntered along the busy 'Change toward Mount Morey's broking-house.

There was a marked contrast between these two men, noticeable to an observer.

Lord Mt. Morey was a man of portly stature, with a florid, fleshy face, brown, dull eyes, iron-gray hair, and side-whiskers to match, and was what would have been classed a business and a society man combined.

His manner was habitually easy and suave, and his general appearance attractive, for he dressed richly, as well he might, being one of the nabobs of the West End.

Sir Ralph Revere was dark both in complexion, eyes and hair, and wore a heavy black mustache, which lent him rather a brigandish appearance. Traces left by trouble, about his eyes, told that his life had not always been the easiest and most successful, and they spoke truly. Although knighted, he was not wealthy like Mt. Morey, his title being the means of his position in the Bank, as director and acting cashier.

His dress was far from elegant, as compared with that of Mt. Morey, yet his manners were refined.

A short walk brought them to his lordship's elegantly appointed private office, where they became seated.

"Now, then, I suppose you are wondering why I brought you here," Mt. Morey said, tossing him a cigar and lighting one himself.

"In truth, I am rather in the dark," Sir Ralph replied. "And my hours of leisure being limited, I trust you will be brief in what you have to say, my lord."

"In that respect I will try to be obliging. You probably know that of late I have been an occasional visitor to your lodgings, in Lynn Place, during your business hours at the bank?"

"I have heard as much," Sir Ralph replied, with darkening brow, "but Cecil always denied it, and therefore I never bothered to ask my lady about it."

Mont Morey smiled.

"Cecil is French, you know," he remarked, "and was bribed. It was the truth you heard, Revere. I have called upon your wife, Isabel, several times. It was first upon solicitation preferred by a note in her handwriting. I found her in a wretched state of mind, complaining bitterly that you did not fulfill your promises to her."

"In what respect, pray?" Sir Ralph demanded, with sudden anger.

"Oh! not from neglect, my boy, but from inability to keep her. That is to say, your purse was inadequate to the bills she must make in order to hold her own in her social circles. Then, too, the lodgings you provided were far from satisfactory to her."

"Stop! I will not listen to this!" Sir Ralph cried, his dusky eye ablaze with passion. "Isabel is proud and ambitious, I'll admit, but she has always been reasonable, and accepted with good grace such as it was in my power to provide."

"Ah! yes, my boy; because she did not wish to worry you. You will remember that Isabel was ranked among the beauties of social London when you wedded her, three years ago, and knew not what it was to be in cramped circumstances, until her uncle renounced her when she took you. She has not lost any of her beauty yet, and the natural desire to queen it in society still clings to her. You will also remember I was a former favored suitor, until you stepped in, by some mistake a reputed millionaire. Your money, youth, and bright promise won her from me."

"I did not rave nor seek the inside of a lunatic asylum, but quietly bided my time. I knew she would regret choosing the young for the old, and it has proven so. On finding her so miserable, I kindly lent her a few thousand pounds to satisfy her current needs, and have continued to favor her thus. Yesterday she confessed her

love for me, and begged me to take her and go to Canada or America. I was thunderstruck and reasoned with her the scandal such a move would cause, but she would hear to nothing. She declared she did not, nor never could love you as a husband, and should seek a divorce if she could not obtain her freedom in any other way. I finally told her I would come to you, and offer you ten thousand pounds to leave the country and never return. This will give her the freedom she so much desires, and will start you anew in another country. Of course you would not care to live with one who can never love you, and there is but one course for you to pursue."

"No!" Sir Ralph said, gazing at the floor, in a dazed sort of way. "I would not live with her, if all is as you say. But before I can believe it I must have better proof. I must have the proof from her own lips."

"Perhaps her handwriting will do as well," his lordship said, tossing a tiny perfumed envelope upon the table at his elbow. "She directed me to give it to you."

Sir Ralph seized it, almost savagely; it needed but a glance to convince him as to the origin of the graceful feminine chirography.

And with such feelings as can better be imagined than described, he perused the contents:

"LYNN PLACE, AUGUST 1.

"SIR RALPH:

"You will have heard all but my confirmation of the bitter truth ere this, and it cannot add much to your grief to know that these few lines are to confirm his lordship's words. Go hence, I beg of you, knowing my sincere pity for you, and never cast one simple thought on the woman whose hand has wrecked your life. Pierre will bring baby Lily to the Bon Ton Garden to-night. Take her, and leave London forever. ISABEL!"

Sir Ralph was upon his feet, stern and erect, as he finished reading.

"The train leaves for Liverpool at nine to-night," he said. "I will leave on that train!"

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWED FROM ENGLAND.

"But, hold!" Lord Mt. Morey, said, as Sir Ralph turned to depart. "Let me first give you the ten thousand pounds I offered you."

"Never!" Revere replied, turning on him, with flashing eyes. "I will not sell a wife's honor, even if you stand ready to purchase, and she be willing. Henceforth, sir, consider me your enemy!"

He then turned and left the office. The door had scarcely closed behind him, when a little withered-up old individual emerged from an inner office, and took the seat Sir Ralph had lately occupied.

"Well, well, it worked like a charm, eh?" he said, wiping his watery eyes, and putting on a pair of green goggles.

"Capital," his lordship replied. "Revere leaves London to-night, and then, off goes Isabel to Dr. Perrot's private asylum, while Cecil steps in as Lady Isabel, marries me, and I get the magnificent fortune. Hal! hal! it's a great scheme."

"Why not marry Isabel instead of the maid?" the withered man asked.

"Because she'd die first, before she would wed me. She hates me, and my only wonder is that she has not long ere this denounced me to Sir Ralph. It is possible, however, after she finds herself caged, that she will take me. I'll try it, before I make sure of Cecil."

"How is she to be trapped?"

"Easy enough. Dr. Perrot visits her in person to inform her that her husband has been seriously hurt in front of his own private hospital, where he lies in a critical condition. Very naturally, she will fly to him, and into a padded dungeon, several of which the doctor has at his command. How like you the idea, Caper Slick?"

"You are a shrewd schemer, my lord—shrewder than I gave you credit for being. Is it sure that Revere will leave England?"

"Positive. I've arranged it so that it will be necessary. Hal! hal!"

Sir Ralph went to Bon Ton Garden that evening, and found Pierre with the child, as Lady Isabel's letter had promised. Pierre was the only man servant they had ever kept—an honest fellow, who never made it his business to mind any one's business but his own.

Sir Ralph did not stop to ask any questions, but took his little two-year-old girl, and left the garden.

She looked wonderingly up into his face, and hugged closer to him, as if satisfied to be with him.

He took a cab and was driven to the Liverpool train, arriving at the station just in time to purchase his ticket, and get aboard.

Something had warned him to prepare himself, and, there being no one in the car, he had no difficulty in clipping off his mustache, with a pair of scissors, and donning a full false beard of sandy tint.

Scarce a moment later two rough-looking men came along the platform with lanterns. Quickly laying baby Lily on the seat, he threw his overcoat over her, and, leaning over, rested his elbow on the window-sill.

The men with the lanterns came along, and paused.

"Humph!" one said. "I told you it was more likely the Folkstone train, Dick."

"Maybe it was," the other growled, doubtfully. "The chap ain't here, anyhow."

Then, they gave Sir Ralph another searching glance, and passed on.

"They were after me," the wronged husband muttered. "In Heaven's name, what foul conspiracy can now be working against me?"

It was a question he was not able to solve, just then. His opportune disguise evidently had saved him from trouble.

Three stations out of London a long-whiskered, portly man got into the compartment and took a seat.

When the train was once more under motion, this person touched Sir Ralph upon the shoulder, and said:

"Revere, I know you."

The baronet wheeled around with a smothered curse.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his eyes glowing desperately.

"I am Joe Demond, the detective," was the reply, "and I am sent to find a defaulter named Sir Ralph Revere. Do you think I will be likely to find him, here?"

Sir Ralph did not reply.

He was dumfounded—horror-struck.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, after a long silence. "In God's name, what's the matter?"

"Oh! nothing unusual," Demond replied. "Lord Mt. Morey suggested to me to-night that the bank of which he is a director, and you have until to-night been acting as cashier, is lacking in funds, to the amount of ten thousand dollars, in bonds and paper, and suspicious of you. I jumped ahead one train to intercept you, and here I am."

"This is an outrageous lie. I left the bank without drawing even my own dues, much less stealing," Sir Ralph cried, indignantly. "If you don't believe me, search me and my effects."

"That is needless exertion," Demond responded, quietly. "If you will take pains to put your hands in your side coat pocket you will find the neat little package where you were seen to place it."

With a gasp of incredulity, Sir Ralph obeyed, and drew forth a package, as the detective had said.

"Heaven help me! this is an infamous conspiracy to ruin me," he cried. "I never put that package in my pocket."

"That is not for me to say, Sir Ralph. My duty is to recover this money, and help you to slide out of England."

"What! you help me to escape?"

"Yes. The bank has detectives waiting for you, at Liverpool. I am employed by your friend, Mt. Morey. He directed me to recover this money, put it in my own pocket, and help you dodge the force at Liverpool."

"I cannot see through it all," Sir Ralph said, slowly. "It is all inexplicable, to me."

"Be that as it may, the next thing to consider is your escape. There is an old English woman of my acquaintance in the next car, who will take your child, muffle it up, and take it aboard the steamer as her own. I have an old man's disguise with me for your use, and will fix you up so Satan won't know you, after the guard takes your ticket."

And so it was arranged.

When Sir Ralph left the train and went aboard an ocean steamer, at Liverpool, it was as an infirm old man, while baby Lily was bundled up and taken aboard by an old emigrant woman.

The detective, Demond, was on hand, and by lying threw several detectives off scent, who had assembled to nab Sir Ralph—at least so the baronet was told by Demond.

And it was not until the vessel was well out of the Mersey that the baronet removed his disguise and felt easy and recovered his child.

And when he reviewed his narrow escape

from a conspiracy to ruin him, he could but thank Mt. Morey and Demond, little dreaming that it was all a put-up job, concocted by the former, to expedite his departure from English shores!

CHAPTER IV.

WILD FRANK DECLINES.

THE scene once more reverts to the broad prairie, but at a period fifteen years later in the onward, never-ceasing stride of this life we live.

Fifteen years from the keen November night when Wild Frank of Montana had left in his charge a little baby over whom to watch and care.

He had been a youth then, but now the hand of time had matured him to robust manhood, as he swept across the Wyoming plains to-night, on the back of a thoroughbred mustang, an exact mate of his Black Jess of fifteen years ago.

A man of barely medium height, compactly built, yet clean-limbed, wiry and muscular, he sat his saddle with the reckless ease characteristic of the true son of the frontier. His elaborately-fringed buckskins and slouch hat proclaiming that he still followed the calling of a prairie scout.

In face he was changed.

His features were more tanned from exposure, and a long, sweeping mustache and goatee, together with his wealth of curling hair, which swept his shoulders, gave him a dashing appearance.

His weapons, consisting of a rifle and revolvers, were of Government pattern, and richly trimmed.

His course pointed westward to right, and he urged his horse with an occasional application of the spur, his eagle glance sweeping the landscape before him, inquiringly.

The night was clear moonlit, as had been the memorable one fifteen years before, only void of the stinging boldness, the air now being soft and warm.

"On, Startle," the scout said—"on, my boy! It's but a matter of five miles from yonder motte to the Papanauth's, where food and rest await us both."

The mustang kept on perseveringly, though it was evident that he was wearied from a long journey.

Presently they approached a prairie motte or a small body of timber, and Wild Frank reined his horse down to a walk, for he knew of a spring therein where water could be obtained for himself and steed.

He had not gained the corner of the timber, however, when a horseman suddenly dashed out in view, and drew rein before the scout's path. A glance sufficed to warn Frank that it was a red-skin, and his rifle came to bear upon the Indian with wonderful quickness.

The Indian gave a grunt in the negative.

"Wild Frank fool," he said, raising his rifle with the muzzle pointed upward, to a ramrod in which was attached a white rag. "Scar-Face come not on war path—come to talk."

"It's lucky you chanced to have the rag ready, my fine buck," the scout said, with a grin, "or you'd be smokin' the eternal pipe o' peace long afore this. What d'ye want with Wild Frank, Injun?"

"Scar-Face sent to meet Buckskin Bravo on prairie," was the stoical reply.

"Oh! so Wyoming Bill sent you, did he?" Frank demanded, his brow darkening. "He trotted you off down here to shear off my precious top-knot, eh?" and the scout's rifle crept once more toward his shoulder.

"No!" Scar-Face cried, hastily. "Wyoming Bill no longer want Wild Frank's scalp. He sent message which explains."

And riding near, he took a folded paper from his belt, and handed it to Wild Frank.

Opening it, the Buckskin Bravo glanced over it, and then read it aloud in a voice filled with sarcastic contempt:

"OUTLAW'S RANCH, November 20, 19—

"WILD FRANK: After many attempts made to capture you, none of which have been successful, I have dropped that game. You have been a bad pill for us to swallow, and we've concluded we'd rather hev a man o' yer grit as a friend than a foe. So of you'll quit wartin' ag'in' us, an' join the game, I'll make ye my first lieutenant. Money an' whiskey is plenty, an' you'll find our lawless life a heap more moral an' edifyin' than yer own. Send an answer back by Scar-Face. Yours, truly,

"WYOMING BILL."

A wild laugh escaped the Buckskin Bravo, as he tore the paper into bits.

"So, the bold lion of the hills has got his fill with the prairie panther, eh?" he said, mockingly.

ly. "Well, I am not surprised. My only amazement is that Bill should not know me well enough from experience to be assured I would tear off my own scalp before I'd accept such terms from him. A bitter foe to outlaws, villains and ruffians at large, from infancy up, I am not likely to change my feelings toward them, at this late stage in my life. You can tell Wyoming Bill this, red skin, and tell him, also, that Wild Frank declines him, and has registered an oath to hunt him down, and bring him to justice, together with the whole of his renegade gang. Go, now—get up and dust before I bore a hole through you. If Wyoming Bill desires to hear further from me, please impress it on his memory that Wild Frank makes it his home at Papanauth's Ranch."

Scar-Face nodded, and setting the spurs to his mustang, dashed away across the prairie, in an eastern course.

Wild Frank watched him, until he had disappeared, more than once gripping his rifle tightly, as though tempted to shoot him.

Finally he rode on into the motte, watered his horse at the spring, and then set on westward, across the prairies, pondering as he rode over this meeting with Scar-Face.

So deep were his reflections that he did not arouse until he heard the crack of a rifle and the whiz of a bullet close to his head.

It took but a glance to discover the author of the attack.

A horseman was just disappearing over the crest of a prairie billow, not a thousand yards in advance of him.

With a shrill yell Wild Frank gave his mustang the rein, and dashed away in hot pursuit, bent on learning who was his new foe.

His first thought was that it was some member of Wyoming Bill's infamous gang.

But on gaining the crest of the billow over which his assailant had vanished, he saw his error.

Below, in a snug little pocket valley was pitched a camp where several camp-fires were burning in front of marquee tents, with a couple of prairie schooners and teams of mules near at hand.

A man was just dismounting from a horse, near one of the camp-fires, and a knot of several men and women clustered around him.

With his rifle ready for use, Wild Frank galloped down into the camp expecting every moment he would be fired upon, but in this was happily mistaken.

The people appeared to be more alarmed than belligerent, and when he drew rein they stood huddled together and regarded him with doubtful glances.

"What do you want here?" the dismounted horseman, a burly, well-dressed man, with heavy side-whiskers, asked.

"I came here to inquire what business you have to practice target-shooting upon inoffensive travelers?" the Buckskin Bravo replied. "I don't generally swallow lead pills without knowing why they were prescribed."

CHAPTER V.

WYOMING BILL, THE OUTLAW.

PAPANAUTH'S RANCH was not a city. Some half a dozen log cabins and their accompanying outbuildings were scattered about on the prairie, of which John Papanauth owned the largest of the lot and it bore the same name which clung to the settlement.

The population did not exceed sixty or seventy, not counting the transients, and were for the most part herders and their families.

The Ranch was a combination of tavern, post-office, grocery store and trading post, presided over by John Papanauth or his pretty sister Ella, who was known far and near as the Humming Bird.

The Papanauths were half-breeds, but despite this fact, no prettier maiden existed on the borders of Wyoming than Humming Bird.

She was of medium height, well rounded and graceful as a fawn. Her complexion, though just a trifle dusky, harmonized well with her jovous features, and the brilliancy of her magnetic black eyes, and her hair when allowed to fall back over her shoulders reached half-way to her feet, in a silken rippling wave.

Except when angered, she was ever joyful and nearly always singing.

Possessed of a rich, pure voice, and a knowledge how to use it, none could rival her in song, and she won her Indian name of Humming Bird from her musical proclivities.

John Papanauth was a swarthy, benevolent

know, very reticent, and inclined to mind no one's business but his own. He never spoke unless spoken to, and when aroused to anger, he was known as a desperate fighter.

Papanauth's Ranch was a general stopping point for trappers, hunters and overland parties bound for the mines, and it was not unusual for the population of the town to be considerably increased by these transients.

Yet, strange to say, on that same night, on which Wild Frank rode down into the tourists' camp, the Ranch had a scarcity of custom.

Three men only, besides John Papanauth, sat at a table playing a game of cards, and wishing considerable whisky to wash down the dust of the cards.

Two of the three, judging by the close resemblance, were brothers. Both were burly, broad-shouldered men, with heavy black hair, mustache and goatee, and were roughly dressed. Exposure to the sun and wind had tanned them to almost an Indian color, and, too, the expression of their faces was anything but saintly.

They were armed to the teeth, and might safely have been classed as ugly customers.

The third man was a slim individual, with apparently but little flesh upon his bones, and a spare, pinched face fully as villainous in its expression as those of the two brothers. His mouth was broad, his nose hooked, and his insignificant eyes were shaded by a pair of spectacles. He wore a Frenchified mustache waxed to a point at the ends, and was dressed in a suit of sordid broadcloth, and a misused, out-of-style silk hat.

An observer would have set the two first described down as thoroughbred ruffians, and the little man of the goggles as a cringing villain.

Yet, at Papanauth's, the trio were regarded with no particular dislike by the residents in general, despite the worderment ever rife as to how they made their living.

The little man, Dr. Deering, had first set himself up as a Justice of the Peace, but Wild Frank had proven him a humbug in that capacity, as he had no papers or authority whatever for such an office.

He had then mixed in with the Harris brothers, and the trio loafed about without any particular occupation, except once in a while to purchase a few furs from the Indians.

Yet they always seemed to have plenty of money, and when hanging about the settlement kept well soaked with whisky. At times they would be absent from the settlement for a week to a month or longer, and then would return and hang around for as long a time, and drink, gamble and carouse.

Perhaps it was from some secret fear of them that the people of Papanauth's never molested them, for there was suspicion in the mind of more than one that they did not come by their money honestly.

To-night they appeared to be more interested in a subdued conversation that ran between them, than in the game of cards they were playing, and frequent glances at stolid John Papanauth, who sat dazing near the fireplace, with a pipe in his mouth, proved that they were not desirous that he should catch the drift of their conversation.

"If he refuses to join us," Dr. Deering said, with a low oath, "then he must die—that is all. We've either got to move out, or Wild Frank has."

"Curse him!" Jim, the eldest of the Harris brothers, hissed, spitefully. "I would like to see him planted, even better than would the grass. For five years he's been pickin' off the best until there's only four whites left, and the devil only knows how many of the reds he's checked off. Yet he goes on killing them, and escapes the traps set for him, as though possessed of as many lives as the proverbial cat. Something, truly, must be done."

"I reckon I've got the most cause to complain," Bob Harris growled. "As you well know, it's the cursed scout that's turned Humming Bird's thoughts from me."

"Bahl you're weak!" the doctor sneered. "Paint heart never won fair lady, you know. If you've got a grudge ag'in Wild Frank, you're the very one best calculated to slip a knife into him."

"Humph! I ain't a fool," Bob declared, sourly. "If you'll find a pilgrim about the ranch, with grit enough to tackle Wild Frank, single-handed, I'll buy a round of whisky. For one I want him quieted, so I can sail in and win Humming Bird."

"So yer bluffed down by the little scout, eh?" Bob Harris grunted. "Waal, now I opine of no war my love case, I'd tell durned quick who was the best man—me or Wild Frank. All you want to do is to talk turkey to the Humming

Bird, an' tell her ef she don't marry you, her fate is decided. Ef she se ye mean business, you bet she'll come to terms."

"Sh!" Dr. Deering warned, as the door to the ranch opened. "Here comes some one. And the captain, in disguise."

A man of great stature had just entered. He was fully six-footer, and broadly proportioned. He was clad in brown overalls, overshirt and stogy boots, with a sloven hat upon his head, and a cloak thrown around his shoulders. The hat was slouched down to the eyes, and was met by a shaggy black beard that nearly hid the rest of the face, except the nose and piercing black eyes.

He entered with a quick glance about the room, and then advanced to where the trio were seated.

"Playin' keards, eh?" he said. "Waal, I don't keer if I do take a hand for a crink."

When he had seated himself at the table between Bob and Jim Harris, he continued in a lushed tone.

"Wh! mum's the word. Big stake ahead. Tourists camped in Pretty Pocket. Old English lord with more money than Croesus and a lovely daughter in the bargain."

CHAPTER VI. THE TOURISTS' CAMP.

THE words of the Buckskin Bravo caused the confounding tourists to flash with anger.

"Aw!" he said, in an affected tone, "ze American speak angry, without ze proper cause, and without ze respect due ze French nobleman. Ze Frenchman see American on ze prairie, and mistake him for ze Injear, an' shoot at him."

"I doubt very much if you were so much mistaken as that," Wild Frank retorted. "Unless your eyes are poor you could have distinguished me from an Indian in this moonlight."

"My eyes zey are very poor," the Frenchman replied, adjusting a pair of gold-rimmed glasses to the rim of his nose. "Ze American no business abroad on ze prairies when ze night falls, for ze travelers to frighten."

"I opine it is none of your business who roams this free soil after nightfall," Frank said, sternly. "It is evident you are a coward, and I can read in your face that your shot at me was intentional. But for the presence of these ladies, I should be tempted to give you a good sound thrashing on the spot. That's the kind of a man I am!"

"Aw! ze American really must parding ze French nobleman for refusing to fight. I have ze *distingue* honor of being Count Alphonse de Rablee, ze chemist merchant prince of ze city of Paris. Ze French gentleman never fight ze inferiors in rank."

"Ze French coward never fight ze bold knight of ze prairies," Wild Frank retorted, sarcastically. "Because he is *afraid*. Hal! hal!"

And he wheeled his horse around to depart.

"Stop," another man of the group said, commandingly—an older person, with white hair and side-whiskers, and every appearance of advanced age. "Don't be so fast, my man. I will apologize to you for the count, who was merely winning a wager. He sallied forth on a wager that he'd get a shot at one of the Aborigines, and doubtless hit took you for one, this being his first visit to the plains. If this explanation is satisfactory, we should be pleased to have you camp with us for the night, as we are sadly in need of a scout and guide, which I perceive you are."

"True, I am a scout, but at present not at liberty," the Bravo replied. "May I inquire whom I am addressing?"

"Certainly, sir. I am Lord Henry M. Morey, of London, and a member of the English parliament elect. The lady on my right is my Lady M. Morey, and the young lady on my left is Lady Lillian, my ward. The rest of my party is composed of Count Alphonse de Rablee, Casper Slick, a noted English barrister, and Henry Irving, my footman."

"Ah!" Wild Frank said, with a slight start of surprise, and a quick searching glance at Lady Lillian, who was one of the prettiest young maidens he had ever seen—a sunnysmiled, sunnysmiled little thing of seventeen or eighteen, attired in a tasty walking habit and jaunty fur cap. Then he turned to Lord M. Morey.

"But, what brings you here, on the prairies so late in the season, sir?"

"Address me as 'my lord,' please," the Englishman said, austere. "It sounds better, you know—more respectful."

"I prefer not," Frank answered. "There is but one Lord whom I look up to, and he is not of flesh. I therefore will address no man on

earth as *my lord*. If you wish to address me and receive a civil United States answer, I am open for entab. Otherwise, I am not!"

"Good for you, scout! I honor your sentiments," Lady Lily cried, with enthusiasm, but Mr. Morey only flushed with rage.

"Curse me, but your impudence is unpardonable!" he cried, striking the ground fiercely with his cane, "and were it not for our unavoidable situation, from which we must be excruciated, I'd have you horsewhipped within an inch of your life!"

"I dare say," the Buckskin Bravo said, with a peculiar smile. "Your condition would probably need still further repairs, after such a change. If your health is at all satisfactory, you'd better remain calm, as sudden changes of temperature have been known to result fatally, here in the West."

"You are right. I'll not quarrel with you," Mr. Morey wisely concluded. "You see, our case is like this: We are a party of English tourists who have been doing the Territories for health and pleasure. We started several weeks ago, overland for the nearest railway point, bound for the States, when our guide—a half-breed—took offense and deserted us, yesterday; and here we are, at a standstill, without any knowledge of our surroundings, or how to reach the railway."

"A bad fix, sure enough," Wild Frank declared. "You could never reach the railway now, even with a guide—at least, it would be a risky undertaking."

"Why, pray?" his lordship demanded, with a scared look.

"Because you'd fall into the hands of one of several bands of vagabond reds, who are lying low for just such picnics as this, between here and the railroad. In addition, there will be a blinding snow-storm of the blizzard pattern, day after to-morrow, which would be apt to use up what the reds leave of you."

The faces of the tourists became doubly anxious—all except that of Lady Lily.

"How do you know this to be true?" she questioned, modestly.

"I know that's reds, because I'm just in from a week's scout among them," Frank replied. "I know there will be a storm from stars taught me by life-long experience on the frontier."

"Then what are we to do?"

"You have a choice of two things: turn back to Papanauth's Ranch, or camp here, and prepare for a week of win or, or more."

"We will remain here," Mr. Morey decided.

"And ze scout better go, now," the count suggested, with a frown, noting Wild Frank's glances at Lady Lily.

CHAPTER VII. THE HUMMING BIRD.

"You could hardly press me to remain, I fancy," Wild Frank returned. "I have heard said a jealous Frenchman was akin to a rattlesnake (ie, and so I will rattle, until an opportunity comes for me to draw the rattlesnake's fangs. Hal! hal! Good-night to you all!"

"Good-night," Lady Lily said, earnestly, while the others looked displeased, Count Alphonse in particular. "I am sure we are all greatly obliged to you, and shall be glad to have you call again."

Seeing that the Frenchman was greatly aggravated, Wild Frank waved his scotch milliner back, gallantly, and Lady Lily took off her own pretty fur cap and returned the parting salute.

"She is a pretty maid," the Buckskin Bravo muttered, as he dashed up out of the valley, and across the level prairie, to the westward. Fair and graceful, thoroughly intelligent and modest, she is just the kind of a woman I would like to call Mrs. Wild Frank. Hal! hal! the idea of a literal old tech like me talking of a wife! I reckon she wouldn't use one of us prairie purps for a deer-mat, ever."

He spoke a trifle bitterly, as though some time in his eventful life he had been closely by some maiden fair, but ever in vain.

A strange fit of moodiness seemed to fall over him as he rode along, and his head dropped forward upon his breast, with a large, deep sigh.

The moonlight showered down upon his shoulders, as if in sympathy with him, and scintillated upon several fearoprops that had fallen upon his mustang's neck.

He did not arouse until his steed came to a halt, and then he came out of his reverie with a start.

Before him was a circle of low-growing shrubs, of the sage-bush order, and within that circle was a green grassy mound, at the head of

which gleamed a little marble slab, partly overgrown with creeping vines.

"Ah! Startle, why did you bring me here, to-night?" he said, passing his hand across his forehead. "D-d some subtle instinct tell you that I was thinking with sadness of the one who lies buried yonder?"

He slipped from the saddle and went over and knelt beside the mound, his chin resting upon his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the headstone over which vines crept clingingly, and proud myrtles nodded in sympathy.

"There is to be a clearing up of the mystery, by and by," he murmured—"something plainly tells me that. And if I mistake not, it will read more hearts than one."

He again relapsed into silence, and remained so until a touch upon his shoulder caused him to start to his feet.

"Humming Bird!" he exclaimed, gazing in surprise at the beautiful half-breed girl who stood near. "Why are you here, so far from the ranch?"

"Because I thought I could find you here, scout. Many times the Humming Bird has found the Buckskin Bravo kneeling by this lonely grave. Why is it so?"

"The same answer that I have given to you as many times as we have chanced to meet here, Birdie," the scout said, sadly. "The grave contains all that is earthly of one whom I once knew as a pure, true-hearted friend. I never pass this spot unless to stop in reverence to the remembered dead. But, tell me, Humming Bird, what brings you here to search for me, when you knew not but what I was far away upon the trail?"

"Something told the Humming Bird she would find Wild Frank here, and she came. She was lonely at the ranch, and she yearned to see the scout, once more to tell him that she loved him."

A pained expression shot athwart the Bravo's features, and he came closer to the pretty half-breed girl, laying one hand upon her fair, round shoulder.

"Birdie," he said, slowly, "I have on more than one occasion told you that I could not regard you in a lover-like way. From infancy we have known each other, and I have regarded you with sisterly affection, but not as a husband should think of a wife. Heart-free, and hand-free, as I am, I prefer to remain so the few years yet allotted me to live."

"If heart-free, then Humming Bird may still hope that the Buckskin Bravo will yet learn to love her," the half-breed girl said. "Humming Bird will never marry unless she can have the Bravo. She has said it."

"Say not so," Wild Frank replied, "for you have many other admirers worth two like me, in a husbandly sense. There is Jack de Herne—as wealthy and worthy a young herder as we have upon the border. He would cut off his right hand to possess you."

"He has never spoken words of love to the Humming Bird," was the doubting answer.

"Because you never gave him the chance, from always hoverin' about me," the scout declared. "You had better go now—it is getting well on into the night, and John Papanough will be anxious about his sister."

"John Papanough is no fool," the maiden replied. "The Humming Bird knows these prairies too well to be lost in a dark night, even. Where is Frank going?"

"Over to the camp of my pards, on Lily creek. It has been a round month since I reported."

"The Humming Bird will go back to the ranch," the girl announced. "But before she goes, Buckskin Bravo must promise her one thing—promise it sacredly—swear it!"

"What is that, Birdie? It is seldom Wild Frank registers an oath—it is never he breaks one."

"I want you to swear," the half-breed girl said, raising her dusky orbs toward the great moon, which soared overhead—"I want you to promise that if you cannot love and wed me, you will never love or wed any one else—especially the pale-faced, stuck-up girl at the tourists' camp."

Wild Frank started, so sudden was the thrust. Humming Bird had been near then, at the time of his visit to the camp!

But he disguised his surprise by a light little laugh.

"Oh, as to that, there is no need of exacting a promise, for the haughty English beauty would disdain to be courted by the rough son of the plains, even were he disposed, which he is not. Therefore there is no necessity of such a promise, Birdie."

"I say there is!" the girl flashed back, stamping her foot.

"Well, well, we won't quarrel about it," the scout said, patting her on the head. "You have always been a friend to me when others have turned aside, so I will make the promise, in another way: If perchance I fall in love with another, and wish to marry, I will first come and ask your permission, and abide by your decision."

"Good! Humming Bird thanks the Buckskin Bravo!" the girl said, tears of gratitude entering her eyes. "She will go now."

She turned abruptly and darted away over the prairie, in a south-westerly direction, never once looking back until she was out of sight of the scout.

Then she paused, and shook her little brown fist toward the tourists' camp, the expression of her face growing dull and moody.

"It is the pale-face girl whom Wild Frank is attracted to. No—maybe not, for he has long ere this told Humming Bird he had no love for her. Humming Bird is not blind, however. It is in the prairie grave, back yonder, that Frank's love lies buried, and it will never be resurrected unless by the proud-faced beauty at the tourists' camp. For Humming Bird no hope is left—no hope is left, except in the grave!"

And she burst into sobs of lonely grief.

CHAPTER VIII OUTLAWS PLOTTING.

To return to the ranch.

The words of the new-comer caused the three villains to start up interestedly.

"What's this you say?" Jim Harris demanded. "If that's anything spioy, give us the full particulars."

The stranger glanced cautiously round the room, again, and then continued, in an undertone:

"There's a fat stake, if properly worked. A party of English tourists is camped over here, a ways—four men and two women, all told. One of the women is a g'gal, and a reg'lar bloomin' primrose, too, you bet! Set it down in your memorandum, she's my meat. Then there's a grizzled old English cock-sparrow—a reg'lar old aristocrat from London, with Lord hitched onto the fore-part of his name—he's the king pin of the party, and carries the swag."

"How much?" the doctor asked, eagerly.

"That remains to be told," Wyoming Bill replied, significantly. "You kin bet high his treasury is fat, for these o'd British skunks don't go a-ballooning about the country without plenty of balast."

"Of course not," Bob Harris agreed. "The fruit tastes good, and there is no reason why we shall not pluck it."

"It may prove to be like Eve's fruit," Dr. Deering suggested, philosophically. "However, the captain is boss."

"It can be worked like a charm. There is no need of our even venturing a hand. Scar-Face and the reds can swoop down and gobble 'em up, and fetch 'em to the head-quarters. There we can relieve them of their valuables, retain the girl, and turn the old uns loose on the prairie to graze."

"A good plan," Jim Harris decided. "But while we're talking over matters, what's to be done with his ribs, Wild Frank? He's been altogether too flush, o' late, to suit our notion, and I reckon he's spiced us, too. First we know he'll have us pounced upon by the marshal for bein' connected with you and the gang."

"He must be planted," Wyoming Bill cried, springing excitedly to his feet. He quickly dropped back in his chair, however, with a muffled curse.

"I forgot myself, so intensely do I hate that scout," he added, in a low, hoarse voice. "I can prescribe no better fate for him, than handing him over to the reds, for the stake. I opine there's enough grease about him to make him burn first-rate."

"Yes," the doctor said, drawlingly. "But this is talk. How many traps have we lain for this devil's own, all to no avail? Three times we've had him in our power, only to have him rescued by his pards—Laughin' Len and Eagle Eye."

"True; but we must manage to cage him this time, so he won't break loose. I have a plan which I think will be successful. I will see Scar-Face to-night, and arrange to have him pounce down upon the tourists, to-morrow night, and capture them. We'll come here, to-morrow night, also, and if Wild Frank turns up, as I've an idea he will, we'll take him and run him off to head-quarters. Should be a

chance to be here, we'll nab the Humming Bird, whom Bob's struck on, and take her along. When Wild Frank learns that both the gals are gone, he'll rightly conclude who's got 'em and make a strike for the hills again, in search of our retreat. We'll have spotters out, and before he is scarcely aware of it, he'll find himself in our power, and at our mercy. How like you the plan?"

"It is a bully one!" Bob Harris agreed, elated at his prospect of gaining possession of the Humming Bird without openly attacking the Bravo, Wild Frank.

"Yes, it suits us," the doctor and Jim Harris assented.

"Then it is settled. To-morrow night we will meet here, ready for business. I will come in a different disguise, but one that you will recognize."

When she had recovered from the paroxysm of grief, the Humming Bird turned her steps back toward the settlement, mechanically, her face still gloomy and tear-stained. When she arrived in sight of the settlement, she halted, and drawing a little whistle from her pocket, blew a shrill blast upon it.

Shortly after a trim Indian pony galloped out from among the cabins, and over to her side, with a whinny of recognition.

Springing upon his back, and heading him toward the west, Humming Bird gave the word, and he galloped away gracefully. For fully an hour the half-breed girl rode on before she drew rein; then it was in a deep, rocky canyon that split in twain a range of rugged hills. It was a dark, lonesome place, where the moonlight did not penetrate, yet enough light crept down from the starry dome above to enable one to see a few yards before.

Dismounting, Humming Bird left her pony to graze, while she hurried on into the depths of the canyon. All around her rocky walls rose high and steep, and upon them were engraven strange rude pictures of Indians, animals and weapons, chiseled out probably by savage sculptors of centuries past and gone.

Taking no notice of these pictures, the Humming Bird hurried on until she came to where a series of stone steps had been chiseled into the face of the left rocky wall, at the top of which there was a round hole in the face of the mountain, no larger than would admit a person's hand, yet extending to untold depth.

Ascending these steps, and kneeling before the aperture, the Humming Bird spoke, in the Sioux tongue:

"Ugh! Great medicine-woman!"

A few minutes elapsed, then came back an answer in a voice that sounded strange and sepulchral:

"Who calls upon Ummagog, the Spirit Medicine-Woman of the Manitou?"

"It is Humming Bird," the girl replied.

"What wants the half-breed girl in the mid of night, when earthly beings are supposed to slumber?" was the next query.

"The heart of the Humming Bird is sad. Her lover, the Buckskin Bravo, no longer cares for her, and will not take her to his wigwam. Humming Bird comes to the Great Medicine for words that will bring back the Bravo to her."

"It is not in the power of the Great Medicine to change the likes or dislikes of mankind," came from the aperture. "Let Humming Bird return to her ranch on the prairies."

"Humming Bird will obey. But first, she wishes to ask one favor."

"What is that?"

"She prays the good medicine-woman to put obstacles in the way, so that Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo, may not hereafter meet and love the English lady called Lady Lillian."

"Who and where is she?"

"She is with a party of tourists, encamped upon the prairie, ten miles east."

"Lady Lillian who?"

"I do not know."

"Who are her companions?"

"An English lord and lady, a French count, a doctor, and a valet."

"What is the name of the English lord?"

"Lord Mt. Morey."

"And the count?"

"Count de Rables."

"And the doctor?"

"Casper Slick."

"Very well; medicine-woman will remember the request of the Humming Bird, who better look for another lover. Let her choose one of her own race."

"The pale-face is as much Humming Bird's race as the red-man," the maiden returned.

then she turned, descended the steps, sought her horse, and rode away once more over the moonlit prairie, toward Papanau's.

CHAPTER IX. ANGEL GABRIEL.

WILD FRANK, after parting with the Humming Bird, rode directly to the camp of his pards, Laughing Len and Eagle Eye, which was located about four miles north-east of Papanau's settlement.

The camp was pitched in a tiny prairie valley, or pocket, upon the shore of a little pond or lakelet, which was fed by a spring that gurgled out from the side of the hill.

It was a famous night-stop for overland parties, familiar with the country, as there was plenty of timber of the chaparral order near at hand, pure water, fresh grass, and lots of buffalo-fish in the lake.

A bright fire was burning before a solitary tent, as Wild Frank descended the slope toward the lake, and around it were gathered three persons. Two of them he readily recognized—the wiry, hump-backed little trapper, Len, and the stalwart, brawny ex-Sioux chief, Eagle Eye. The third person he could not place in his memory, and yet failed to recognize him even when he rode into camp and dismounted.

He was a very aged person, of over medium height, yet very thin in flesh, with long hair and a great sweeping beard which covered the most of his face, and all of which was of snowy whiteness.

He reminded Wild Frank of a picture he had once seen of legendary Rip Van Winkle, as he sat upon a log near the fire, partly leaning forward on a staff, for he was even as ragged as Rip after awakening from his long repose.

"Hello! back, air ye?" Laughing Len greeted, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"How's Injun?"

"Rather noisy. Indications are that it'll be a blustery winter with 'em," the Buckskin Bravo answered. "Who's this old delegate, you have here?"

"I am the Angel Gabriel!" the old man said, facing about, and eying Frank keenly. "I am here to warn all sinners to prepare, for it lacks but a few days of the time when I shall toot my trumpet."

"Oh! is that so?" Frank exclaimed, but with a smile, for he quickly saw the light of insanity burning deep in the eyes of the stranger. "So we can all prepare to shuffle off our coil, eh?"

"Verily so said I," was the grim response, and the prophet again fixed his gaze upon the fire, and relapsed into silence.

"Yes, that 'tarnal cuss tumbled down inter camp, ter-night," Len said, "an' preached kingdom kum, as long as yer arm—so I reckon! it must be so, or he wouldn't say et. An' I was jest considerin' about sendin' Eagle Eye over ter the ranch to git a supply of tobacco for the trip, when I see'd you comin'!"

Then the scout went off into a hearty laugh, and laughed till he had to hold his sides in pain.

"Ugh. Grabel crazy," Eagle Eye said, gruffly. "He big fool like drunk squaw."

"No, I am not crazy, or drunk," the stranger spoke up. "I'm Gabriel—the great and only Gabriel—and the toot of my trumpet shall be heard throughout the land."

"Where is your trumpet, brother Gabriel?" Wild Frank asked.

"It shall be handed down to me by a regiment of winged messengers, from above, in due time," was the solemn response.

Then the old fellow rolled himself up in a blanket that Eagle Eye had given him, and lay near the fire, closing his wild eyes as if for repose.

"What's to be done with him?" Len demanded, calling Wild Frank one side, after a while.

"Jes' crazy, eh?"

"Yes—touch'd somewhere. Let him alone, and he'll harm no one."

"Got o it! He might lift our hair while we're sleeping!"

"Fshaw! I'll run the risk of mine, and it's longer than yours. Angel Gabriel's all right if you let him alone."

As appeared to be sleeping peacefully when the scouts rolled themselves up in their blankets, and they felt no particular fear from his presence.

Yet it is and old an wise saying that appearances are deceitful, and it proved so in this case.

No sooner did the distinct heavy breathing of the scouts become audible, than the maniac started, then cautiously raised upon one elbow.

His eyes were now gleaming with intense warning.

Not apparently satisfied that they were sleeping, he seized a pebble and tossed it over on the ground near their heads, and lay quickly back upon his blanket.

No stir was made by the pards, which appeared to be proof that they were asleep. The hearing of the prairie scout is as keen as the scent of a hound, and, unless very sound asleep, it does not require much to disturb him—a fact that the maniac seemed to comprehend.

Rising, he took a good look at the surroundings before making a further move.

Then, crouching, he stole cautiously toward where the pards were rolled in their blankets, making not so much noise as a cat might have made.

Taking a vial of whitish liquor from his pocket, he held it to Wild Frank's nose. Then he repeated the operation on Laughing Len, and next on Eagle Eye.

This seemed to satisfy him, for he gave vent to a strange laugh, and spurned each of the sleepers with his foot, and, as they awakened not, he knew that they were unconscious.

"Now I will know what I want to know," he said, kneeling by Wild Frank's side and rummaging in his pockets. "They thought I was a fool, but made a grand miscalculation."

This thought seemed to please him, for he laughed long and loud.

He took everything out of Wild Frank's pocket, but failed to find what he sought for there.

"Yes, this is he—I was not wrong," he muttered; "but he has not the proof—the blessed proof. Ha! ha! with that I could meet the vultures, and face them out in their imposition."

He was not satisfied still, and next searched Laughing Len and Eagle Eye, and the saddle trappings of the party. But with the same result.

He then rose to his feet, and glared about him fiercely, passing his hands before his eyes several times.

"I have failed. My only hope is to lie in wait for my man," he muttered, "and get him cornered. Then, if I don't find out what I want, I'll cut his heart out and eat it."

His threat seemed to remind him of something, for he went back, removed Eagle Eye's belt, and strapped it upon his own waist, and then thrust the weapons of the three scouts into it.

Laughing wildly he turned and pranced out of the camp, in the way a frisky colt might have done, seeming to be overjoyed at his freedom.

His course he shaped so that it would bring him to the tourists' camp, but he was destined not to reach it without interruption.

He had accomplished scarcely half the distance when there was a whizzing sound, and a lasso settled around his waist, and threw him to the ground.

Seized with a sudden fury, he tore the noose asunder with as much ease as though it had been made of straw, and sprung once more to his feet with a pair of cocked revolvers in his hands, to meet—Dr. Deering!

"The d—!" the doctor gasped, evidently not expecting the weapons. "Put up your hands!"

"Ha! he!" sneered the maniac. "I won't do it. Free again, devil—free this time for good. We ain't in Deering's private asylum now, are we? Ho! ho! I guess not. I'd shoot you now, only I've got other matters to attend to. But you shall hear the toot of Gabriel's trumpet, soon—take my word for that!"

CHAPTER X.

DEERING TRIES A DEAL.

DEERING grew livid with rage when he saw that Angel Gabriel was prepared and disposed to defend himself.

"Fool!" he cried, stamping his feet, "do you not know that your plan is fruitless? Drop your weapons at once, and return to the cave and remain there till I return."

"I won't!" Gabriel answered, doggedly.

"Refuse, curse you, and I'll let the bloodhounds loose, that nightly howl before the door of your dungeon. They'll make quick work of you."

"Ha! ha! let 'em loose," the maniac replied, with a cunning grin. "They won't hurt anyone."

"Why not?"

"Because I cut their heads off when I got free. He! he! Mr. Deering, you've lost your patient! Go seek another. I'm free—free. For years I've been crazy, but now that I am free I feel better. Twice before I eluded you, and the Mother of Satan came to me and anointed the spot on my head that you used to pound. I'll find

her. He! he! then you'll hear the trumpet. Ha! ha! ha!"

And turning he sped away once more. The moon went under a cloud at this instant, and when it emerged Deering had lost sight of the maniac.

"Curses on my stupidity!" he roared, grating his teeth together.

"If I do not recover him, my pie is dough. But, pshaw! it will be no difficult matter to capture him, if I set the right agents after him. And in the meantime, the plan I have been so long conceiving has arrived at something like maturity, and it behooves me to strike while the iron is hot."

With a villainous expression of countenance, he placed a mask upon his face, and then struck off toward the tourists' camp, at a rapid gait.

On arriving on the crest of the hill, overlooking the camp, he lay flat upon his stomach, and took a survey of the situation.

A camp-fire was burning in front of the tents, but no people were visible near it.

"They've turned in, likely, which is just as well for my purpose," he muttered. He then tried a similar plan to that of Angel Gabriel's earlier in the evening—hurled a stone down into camp. The fall of the stone arousing no one, he boldly descended into the camp, and began to reconnoiter, cautiously.

The larger of the tents seemed to strike his fancy the most, and crawling a keen edged hunting-knife from his belt, he cut a slit in one side of the tent large enough to admit of the passage of a man's body without any trouble.

He then stood still and listened, to learn if the noise thereby occasioned had aroused any of the occupants of the tent. No stir being audible, he waited a matter of ten minutes longer—then parted the canvas, and peered within.

Lord Mt. Morey lay with his head close to the aperture, a fact which seemed to increase Deering's satisfaction, for his eyes gleamed, wickedly.

Seizing the baronet around the throat with a vise-like gripe, he hauled him from the tent, and then quickly thrust the muzzle of a revolver into his mouth.

"There! silence, now!" he commanded, sternly. "Utter but a single peep, and I blow your brains out."

Mt. Morey was a coward at heart and grew white with fear. Indeed, most any mortal would scarcely have envied him his position.

"That's the ticket," the doctor said, as he witnessed this obedience. "Now, then, put up your paws, above your head, and follow me to the top of yonder hill, where we will sit down and have a confidential chat, on business."

And he proceeded to walk off up the hill, backward, still keeping one hand on his lordship's shoulder and the revolver muzzle between his lips. Mt. Morey followed with lamb-like submission, and altogether it was a moving tableau such as had never been seen on that prairie, before.

When they reached the crest of the hill, the doctor motioned his lordship to a seat upon the grass, and assumed a like position himself, not forgetting, however, to keep his man covered.

"There! we're by ourselves, now," he announced, with a chuckle of delight. "I went down and tuk you, purty clever, like, didn't I?"

"I cannot understand the meaning of this strange and unwarrantable indignity," his lordship growled, half in anger, half in fear.

"Oh! probably not," Deering answered with provoking composure. "There's many a man as slips inter ther next word 'at don't expect it till it comes, kinder suddint, like."

"What! you don't mean to murder me?" the nobleman demanded, in horror.

"Well, that depends how you act," the doctor averred. "If you answer all my questions, business-like, and make everything as clear as Taos lubricatin' oil, I opine I may let you retain possession of your ethereal substance awhile longer. But if you go to actin' up muleish, I'll guarantee your baggage will pass over Canaan's suspension bridge without any rechecking or transferring, whatever—you bet!"

"Go on. I will answer any question in my power," Mt. Morey humbly answered, his eyes never once leaving the revolver.

"Oh! ye will, eh? Well, then, we'll resort to business. You're Lord Mt. Morey, a high-cock-olorum from the Island, eh?"

"I am Lord Mt. Morey."

"Hev been travelin' all over the U. S., eh?"

"I have traveled extensively in America."

"Been searchin' fer some one?"

"I have."

"Been advertising fer some one?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Found him?"
 "I have not."
 "Revere was the name, eh?"
 "Yes—do you know him?"
 "S'at up. What do you want of him?"
 "That, sir, is my private business."
 "Look out! Tell me just the solid facts of the case, or I'll perforate you."
 "What can it matter to you?"
 "A great deal. Answer my question—what do you want of Ralph Revere?"
 "Mr. Morey was silent a moment."

"It cannot hurt to tell you, as I see," he said. "I want Revere to prove an heirship. Years ago he fled from England to this country, to evade justice. Shortly afterward a heavy legacy was bequeathed as we first supposed to his wife, but afterward found to his daughter. Revere's flight had crazed his wife, and she was the inmate of a private asylum. No one seemed to know what had become of the child, which had been left alone upon the world, so I took the matter into my own hands, and hunted it up. When I produced it, the executors of the deceased man who had left the fortune, were suspicious and over careful, and would not surrender the fortune until they had proof from both of the parents. I took them and the child to the mad-house, but the mother would not recognize her own offspring. I then threw the matter into the courts, but accomplished nothing, after years of lawing. For five successive seasons I have since toured America, in search of Ralph Revere, but all to no purpose."

"The girl you have, of course, is not Revere's own child?" Deering said, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Why not, pray?"
 "Oh! you'd hard'y lavish so much time and expense on another's child,—unless you saw a wide channel for reimbursement."

Mr. Morey smothered an oath.
 "That matters not, sir. You know where Revere is, do you?"

"Oh! perhaps—again perhaps not."
 "What will tempt you to tell his whereabouts?"

"I am not prepared to set terms to-night. Who has charge of the fortune?"

"An English representative of the party is on his way to join me upon the way East, now in a few days."

"Oh! then I'll wait," Deering said. "I'll see you again. And he arose abruptly and took his leave."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FRENCHMAN WAXES BAD.

The following day was a glorious one for November.

The sun arose in a clear deep-blue sky, and flooded mother earth with a bright, warm light, which glistened upon the prairie pools and streams, and kissed the mountain tops with warm caresses. A dim, hazy mist or vapor seemed to hang around the horizon, and this alone caused a troubled expression to come to more than one brow, for it bespoke what was to come.

A storm was but a few hours off—a "blizzard," as it was termed upon the prairies, which is composed of a blinding whirl of snow and wind, which lasts all the way from ten minutes to five days without cessation, as the case may be, and in which no son of the prairie ever cares to be caught. For it is certain bewildering death to attempt to wander in one of these storms when they last, as usual, three or four days, and it is equally dangerous to remain still, in one place.

And although the morning was warm and Indian summer-like, it did not deceive the settlers of Papanau's, and they could be seen galloping over different parts of the prairie ocean in quest of their respective herds, to bring them in to corral.

"Big Storm!" John Papanau said, sententiously, as he stood in the doorway of the ranch, and with his pretty sister, gazed out over the rolling expanse, which lay seemingly unbroken, for miles to the eastward—as far as the naked eye could reach. "Bigger storm than come in years. Humming Bird mind ranch—John go hunt up cows."

"Oh! no! Let me go for them," the maiden said, eagerly. "Humming Bird find 'em easily."

"As you like, then. Hurry 'em into the corral, or the blizzard'll catch you."

With alacrity the Prairie Pet, as she had been aptly christened, obtained her horse, and was soon dashing away merrily across the dun prairie, riding with seeming recklessness.

She had seen the ten cows which composed her

brother's herd, a couple of days before, in the vicinity of the prairie motte where Wild Frank had met the renegade chief, Scar-Face, and accordingly headed her mustang in that direction, now.

In the course of an hour she drew rein at the edge of the motte, and dismounted. Entering the timber she began a hasty search for the cattle, singing the while with touching sadness in her tone.

She was perhaps thinking more about Wild Frank than of her errand, for, without being on her natural look-out for danger, she ran most unexpectedly upon a foe.

A man she met, almost face to face, and that man held a shot-gun leveled directly at her.

It was the Count de Rablee, and an exultant smile mantled his disagreeable countenance.

"Ze grande catch!" he chuckled. "Ze French count catch ze wild Injine. Hei hei! Ze Lord Mt. Morey tink ze count no great warrior, but he will find ze grande mistake."

"What do you mean, sir?" Humming Bird demanded, sternly. "Be kind enough to lower your weapon, and let me pass."

"Oh, no," Rablee said, with another villainous smile. "Ze Lord Mt. Morey say ze French are cowards—say ze French 'traid of ze American Injine. I make ze grande catch of ze Injine, and show ze Lord Mt. Morey zat ze Frenchman resemble ze coward."

"You are a fool!" Humming Bird said, indignantly. "I am not an Indian, and you are a cowardly squaw to molest a defenseless girl, even were I an Indian."

"Yes, Alphonse Rablee, and if you don't lower your aim, and let her pass, I'll put a bullet in your head on my own accord!"

Rablee started as though he had been shot in reality, and wheeled about to find himself confronted by Lady Lily, who had stolen into the timber, unawares.

"Diablo! ze Lady Lily, here?" he gasped, flushing, and not knowing how to excuse himself.

"Yes, ze Lady Lily, here!" the young woman retorted, contemptuously. "You are a pretty puppy, now, aren't you, Gus de Rablee?"

"Ze puppy! Mon Dieu! ze insult, mam'selle—just tink of ze insult. Ze lucky thing you not ze man, or I challenge you to fight ze duel."

"Bah! you are a coward and sneak, so there!" Lady Lily retorted. "Young lady, you can go on. I wish to talk to his honor, ze grande count!"

With a thankful glance, Humming Bird bowed, and then sped on into the depths of the motte.

"And now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" her ladyship demanded, turning imperiously upon her companion tourist.

"Nothing," Rablee replied. "Ze Injine roams in ze forest, an' I hunt ze savage and make ze grande catch, and win ze wager of ze mi-lord."

"Yes, I understand. You'd probably have harmed the inoffensive thing had I not opportunely arrived. You Frenchmen are cowards and ruffians, count!"

"Not so; ze Lady Lily is mistaken."

"Don't contradict me—I know better," she answered, with temper. "I came over here to tell you they are packing up at the camp, preparatory to moving over to a place called Papanau's Ranch. In the meantime, while we are here alone, Alphonse de Rablee, I want to come to an understanding with you."

Rablee's eyes sparkled.

"Anything to accommodate ze lovely Lady Lily!" he said, rubbing his hands together. "I pray for ze grande occasion when I may spill ze noble blood in ze veins in behalf of ze Lady Lily."

"Bah! your would-be gallantry is disgusting. Do you know I'd rather have a grizzly bear hug me than you, sir?"

Rablee's countenance fell, and his gray eyes grew hard in their expression.

"Ze Lady Lily insult ze count twice!" he growled.

"If you call it insult, you'll get insulted all your life. One thing I want to ask you—am I or am I not the real child of Revere and the rightful claimant to this fortune? You can tell me, and thus relieve me of the doubts that of late years have assailed me, like a phantom."

"Of course, you are ze original," Rablee answered, promptly. "What ze world ever make you tink ze difference from zat?"

"I don't know. I could never make it seem so. I have ever been in fear that I would turn out to be some picked-up waif, to fill the proud position I occupy."

"Ze Lady Lily need not fear ze least. Her

rights promise to be established as ze rightful heir of ze baronet, Sir Ralph Revere, in a short time."

"God grant that!" the beautiful girl said, gazing at the ground. "If I should turn out not to be, I would kill myself. Alphonse de Rablee, why is it you always form one of our party, and pay your attentions to me? Answer me!—is it not because there is an understanding between Mt. Morey and yourself, that I am to be your wife, when I come into possession of this fortune?"

"Ze Lady Lily has expressed ze exact terms of ze understanding," Rablee confessed, with an exultant smile. "Ze French count an' ze English lady make ze grande match, and set ze Parisian circles on ze qui vive!"

"It has occurred to me such might be the scheme!" the young woman said, lifting her head, and her face paling. "But fear me, now, sir, swear that fortune or no fortune, I will never wed you—no, a thousand times no!"

"We will see!" Rablee said, drawing a disk. "You shall swear you will marry me, now, or you never go back to ze camp, alive. Zat is sworn to."

CHAPTER XII.

RABLEE TAKES A MUD BATH.

"MONSTER!" Lady Lily cried, stepping back, her face growing deathly pale. "You surely would not attempt such a ghastly crime as murder?"

"Ze love of mankind will oftentimes drive ze man to desperate deeds," Rablee returned, fiercely. "You say ze is no love in your heart for me."

"Not not I do not love nor do I even respect you!" Lady Lily answered, courageously.

"Who else is it you love?" the Frenchman demanded, savagely. "Show him to me—mon Dieu, I eat his heart out!"

"Bah! the man I love would not deign to fight so contemptible and cowardly a cur as you. He is a man as brave and fearless as all these prairies know."

"Ze devil! You do not mean ze insolent scout?"

"Ay! just that very insolent scout. He is my ideal of brave and noble manhood. To be sure, I do not suppose that I love him, for acquaintance has been no acquaintance at all. But I took a real liking to him—indeed I did."

"Then ze infatuation shall end now," he cried, fiercely, raising the knife. "Sweet heavens, to tink of ze scout again, and zat you will marry me, or I will plunge ze dagger into your heart, now and here. That will settle ze little affair of love, without ze trouble of a duel with ze scout."

"Not I would die a hundred times before I would swear anything of the kind!" Lady Lily responded. "Strike me if you dare, you cowardly wretch!"

"Ho! ho! you shall see!" Rablee yelled, rushing upon her with uplifted knife, like an infuriated animal.

But the blow he undoubtedly would have given remained unstruck, for the knife was suddenly torn from his grasp, and he was dealt a blow beside the head that sent him tumbling to the ground, head foremost.

When he scrambled to his feet he had the chagrin of seeing the dashing Buckskin Bravo, Wild Frank, by Lady Lily's side, with his arm folded across his breast.

"Diablo!" he hissed, his countenance flaming with rage. "Ze scout!"

"Yes, the scout," Frank answered, sturdily. "so now, if you're itching for a tussle, I'm on hand to accommodate."

"Curses on you!" the Frenchman gritted, rubbing his bruised ankle. "I have you arrested for ze assault and ze battery."

"Oh! you contemptible cur," Lady Lily cried. "Oh, you big coward. Why don't you fight it out with a man, if you dare?"

"Mon Dieu! Ze French nobleman will never soil his hands on ze rude American. I will return to ze camp, and have ze scout arrested for assault and ze battery."

"Oh! no, don't be in a hurry," and Wild Frank leveled a revolver at the chemist's head.

"If you try to sneak off without apologizing to this estimable lady for your ungentlemanly conduct, I will have to make a hole in your head to remember you by."

"To ze Lady Lily I apologize humbly—to ze scout I make none!"

"Oh! you won't, eh? Well, well. We shall have to see to that. Throw down your arms, and I will box your ears."

"Ze very zing, sir! I have ze grand pleasure of making ze scout's head ache."

The severity with which the count threw down his knife and gun seemed to indicate that he had had experience in the manly art of self-defense.

"Ouf you will get hurt," Lady Lily protested, laying a hand upon Frank's arm, anxiety depicted upon her fair, pretty face.

"Hut hat no,—out by the French delegate," the Buckskin Bravo replied, with a smile. "If you wa ch sharp, you'll see his excellency sticking head first in yonder bog."

Close to where they were standing was a miry pool, more commonly known on the prairies as a "buffalo willow," the stagnant condition of which made it anything but a desirable bathing place, for it was about an equal mixture of water and mud.

Springing quickly forward, Wild Frank seized the count in his arms, and without much apparent effort pitched him into the pool, head first, his heels brandishing wildly in the air.

"There! I reckon he'll need to polish up a little before he assaults you again, lady," the scout announced dryly. "Have you a horse handy?"

"At the edge of the grove, sir."

"Then allow me the honor of escorting you to it," And she accepted his arm and they walked out of the motte.

"I can never thank you too much for your brave interference," Lady Lily declared, giving him her little gloved hand, after he had gallantly assisted her to mount her snow-white pony. "I—"

"No thanks required, ma'am," the scout replied, raising the hand to his lips. "The words I by chance overheard more than repaid me for any trouble I may ever be put to in your behalf."

Lady Lily's cheeks grew scarlet.

"You must pardon me," and she averted her face. "You know we often say things we hadn't ought to, just to spite a disagreeable person."

"Ouf yes, I see. I shouldn't for a moment have thought a lady like you could admire a rough burr like me!" he said, his face slightly flushed in expression.

"Yes, you should, too," she cried, impulsively, looking full in his face, with her lustrous eyes. "I do admire you as a true and brave son of the prairies, and am not ashamed to own it, and, what is more, I should esteem it an honor to have your friendship."

"Thanks, my lady. The friendship was yours long ago, rough and unpolished, but yet true. If ever you are in need of a strong arm of assistance, remember Wild Frank is the one who carries it for you, when he is around. You had best go, now, for I hear ze French guss a-snooring and blowing like a porpoise, back in the woods, and in his rage he may accidentally shoot you."

"But, he will harm you, also!"

"Never fear of that. I will see that he don't touch me. I overheard you say your camp was moving to Papanough's?"

"Yes. Something has suddenly changed Mr. Morey's mind, and he has resolved to stay on the prairies a part or maybe all of the winter, and therefore he will move to the settlement."

"It is wise. As I told you the last evening, to-morrow dawn, this prairie will be enveloped in what we term a blizzard."

"Ugh! I dread storms. Will I see you again, scout?"

"In all probability, yes. Au revoir!"

And the Buckskin Bravo raised his broad-brimmed hat, gallantly, as she touched up her horse and galloped gracefully away, the meanwhile kissing her finger-tips to him, with a roguish smile.

Wild Frank then stepped into a clump of bushes, and waited until the French nobleman emerged from the motte, and struck off toward camp, swearing deadly vengeance against the author of his troubles.

He was a sorry-looking being, dripping and covered entirely with mud and slime from the pool, his face as black and streaked with mud as it well could be.

"Revenge! revenge! ze grande diabolical revenge on ze scout," Wild Frank heard him roar, as he struck out across the prairie.

When he had gone from sight down beyond a wave in the dun expanse, the scout shouldered his rifle and strode away to the north-west, at a rapid gait. And, unknown to him, a pair of eyes watched him until he was out of sight—the jealous eyes of the Humming Bird, who had seen their parting, with a flushed face, and rapidly beating heart.

"They love each other!" was all she said, but said it bitterly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRAVE AND ITS CONTENTS.

THAT night the moon arose early, for it was near its full.

The sky was overcast with a faint filmy fleec of moving clouds, which caused the radiance of the great luminary to shed a ghastly light upon the prairies.

The wind was rising and blowing keenly, and the indications all seemed to be that the predicted storm was not far off.

The moon had cleared the horizon about an hour, when Wild Frank dashed down across from the north, and drew rein at the little prairie cemetery, with its single grave, where he had stopped the previous night.

The little headstone gleamed startlingly in the spectral moonshine, and the very surroundings seemed grim and uncanny.

"It isn't exactly such a night as grave-robbers are supposed to work," Wild Frank muttered, huskily, as he dismounted and took a searching look around, "but it will have to answer my purpose. By Jove! it isn't a job I fancy, at all, either; but something tells me that it will be to my advantage to know the contents of the box I buried here four years ago."

He took a spade and pick from his saddle-bags, and commenced to open the little mound.

He worked rapidly, until the sweat started upon his brow.

Once he stopped and listened, but resumed his work, a minute later, with a scowl. He had thrown out but a few more shovelfuls of dirt, however, when he paused again, and this time detected the scarcely audible sound of approaching footsteps.

"I thought my ears were reliable as ever," he muttered, stepping to the side of his mustang, and seizing his trusty rifle. "Some one is approaching!"

He swept the prairie in all directions with his keen glance, but could see nothing within the range of his vision, except the dun-hued prairie-grass.

"I'll send a tester, anyhow," he said, listening again. "It may scare 'em off. It wouldn't be exactly to my liking to have an intruder step in, just now!"

His acute sense of hearing told him pretty nearly where the prowler was, coming along in the course with the stiff breeze, and, raising his rifle, he chanced a shot in that direction, his rifle speaking savagely.

The report was followed by a wild, strange yell—then all was still.

"That warn't no Indian squeak, nor a death-yell, either, I allow," he said, standing quietly, awaiting developments.

"Sounded like as if it might have been the Angel Gabriel, who blew his trumpet when my little hornet stung him. Hope it didn't do him much damage, whoever it was."

Nothing further was heard, and he naturally concluded that he had scared off the game.

Seizing his shovel, he again set to work and soon had the grave opened and came to a rough box.

It was pretty well rotted, and he had no difficulty in tearing off the lid.

Within, fully revealed in the ghostly moonlight lay a human skeleton, the wealth of hair yet clinging to the grinning skull pronouncing it the remains of a woman.

The face of the scout grew pained in expression as the ghastly sight met his gaze, and tears filled his eyes.

"Poor Myrtle!" broke from his lips in a husky whisper. "God grant you a place beside His throne, for no purer angel ever existed upon this earth."

He then took a little ebony box from beside the skeleton, slipped it into his hunting-sack, and replaced the rude coffin lid, shutting out the view of the dead.

Springing from the grave, he gazed around, sharply.

No one was in sight; so seizing the shovel, he proceeded to fill the grave, and restore things to their former condition.

When he had finished, he knelt in silence beside the mound, with bowed head, and thus remained several minutes, until something startled him.

It was but a flake of snow, fallen upon his hand. But to him its message was of the utmost significance and he leaped quickly to his feet and into the saddle.

Away up in the moonlit north-west a dense gray line was visible which was approaching with tremendous velocity.

It was the blizzard.

"Now, then, my boy," Wild Frank said, giving the rein to his impatient mustang, "scout

the best you know how. It's a reg'lar snorter like we had ten years ago, and with us. It's Papanough's or—death."

And as if seeming to fully understand the words, the mustang leaped away over the prairie at the top of his speed, and his rider huddled low upon his neck to facilitate his speed. But 'twas no use.

In less than five minutes the whole surrounding country was enveloped in the vortex of the blizzard.

The blizzard struck Papanough's Ranch some after the Buckskin Bravo had discovered it, and shook the stanch cabin until it trembled throughout.

More of a crowd than usual was congregated within the ranch to-night, for the warning of the approaching storm had driven in such trappers, hunters and herdsmen as had no regular abode, besides some transients from mountain and prairie, among whom was the male portion of the Mt. Morey party, the ladies having been quartered in a vacant cabin close by.

The two Harris brothers, Dr. Deering, and the mountain outlaw terror, Wyoming Bill, were seated at a table in a further corner of the room, drinking and playing cards.

The outlaw chief was disguised in a sandy wig and full beard, and though there were a score or more in the room who were his deadly enemies, they did not suspect his presence.

The Humming Bird was assisting her brother behind the bar, and looked prettier than ever, it seemed, in the lamp-light—at least so thought Bob Harris, whose baleful eyes were ever fixed upon her.

"Yas, et's a reg'ar old-fashioned blizzard, by eyes, an' she's goin' ter make things hum a couple days at last!" remarked old Red River Sam, one of the veteran Indian fighters and trappers of Wyoming and New Mexico—a gray-haired, rough-looking old coter who could show more teeth than any man in the room.

"An' et's a right comfortable thing not to be out on the prairies to-night, ef a feller wants ter survive, tho' here's what did stan' et out in a consarned blizzard, ten year ago, for three mortal days, and then come out lunk. 'Spec ther words is all heer to-night."

The remark set the inmates of the ranch to looking around them to see if any of their acquaintances were missed.

"One man is missin', an' ten to one et'll be his last blizzard!" Jim Harris said, in a low tone, to his companions.

"Who?" Wyoming Bill asked—"not our man?"

"Yes, Wild Frank. 'Sl! the rest have discovered his absence."

"Hut! Wild Frank Waddle isn't here!" laughing Len cried. "He left camp this morning and said he'd be here to-night."

"He's not here," John Papanough added, who always kept an eye on those who came and went. "He hasn't been here to-day."

"Then it's a gone goose!" Red River Sam averred. "Heer it how! outside! No human kin live ter hunt his way out of this storm."

"Wild Frank gone!" Humming Bird cried, excitedly. "Then I shall go hunt him!"

"No ye won't, nuther!" Bob Harris murmured, scowling. "Ye ain't gotter lose yer life fer t'at kank—not while I'm heer."

"Nor is ther any need of it!" a voice cried, as the door swung open, "for Wild Frank's on hand, in time for the picnic!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSE THAT DIDN'T WORK.

It was in truth the Buckskin Bravo who strode into the ranch, covered with snow until he looked like a snow-man.

A cheering shout arose from the lips of his several particular friends and acquaintances, and Humming Bird ran forward and put both her hands in his, joyfully, much to the chagrin and rage of Bob Harris.

"I am so glad you have come back, Wild Frank," she said, earnestly. Then she quickly added, in an undertone: "Sh! watch out! I fear there is mischief brewing."

"Thanks, Birdie," he said, pressing her hand, and then releasing it. "I will bear it in mind."

He had to shake hands with others whom he knew, for all were glad to see him.

"Yes, I came pretty near having to make a river trip," he confessed, in answer to many questions. "In fact, I couldn't have found my way, but for the sagacity of my mustang."

"Want, I'll give hands wi ye on yer good luck," Red River Sam said, shaking hands. "Heer's wol's been thar, an' I know how all-fired

curious a feller feels when he runs afoul o' a blizzard, an' don't know whether he's wanderin' inter Palestine or Purgatory. So you're goin' ter celebrate the event o' yer escape by celebratin' a reglar old picnic, eh?"

"Well, not exactly, pard. I heard there was goin' to be a sort o' rumputdown here to-night, and thought I'd be on deck to see if I somehow couldn't work a fist in."

"Bully fer you, Franklin, old alligator, an' ef you want backin', call on Red River Sam, sir—the old war-hoss of Wyoming."

"I guess he wouldn't lack backin'," Laughing Len replied, "bein's the majority knows whar Wild Frank lives when he's to hum. So if thar's enny one got any bones to pick, now's the time to start the music."

Not a word was said by the four outlaws in the corner, but they went on playing, as if they had not heard the broad hint slung at them.

They had heard the conversation, however, and knew it meant business.

"I reckon we shall hev to postpone the plan we've been makin' calculation on," Wyoming Bill said, in an undertone. "Ibar appears to be a fearful big mice smelt somewhat, herabouts, an' I reckon you're thar ones what's suspected. I'm so well disguised, that I'm all right."

"Well! what's to be done? Are we going to let the chance slip?"

"No, not exactly. I'll tell you my plan. We can't git Wild Frank, now—that's certain, for he's too many pards here, to-night. But, if we work it right, I reckon we kin snatch the gal, and make off with her."

"Who in thunder kin reach the cave to-night, in this howlin' blizzard?" Bob Harris growled, not fancying the prospect as he listened to the mournful shrieks of the wind around the cabin.

"But one man in fifty could lead the way to the mountains, and we have that man!"

"Who is he?"

"Scar-Face, the renegade."

"But where is he?"

"Out-side with a score of the braves, crouching beside the cabins."

"Then it's a devilish good time for an attack," Deering declared.

"By no means," Wyoming Bill protested. "Thar's too many fightin'-men present. My plan is this: You three separate, watch your chances, and slip from the ranch, leaving me alone. I'll look out fer myself. As soon as ye can, find Scar-Face, and tell him to get ready for a start. Then you make for the cabin whar the tourists hev put up, and capture the gal for me. Then ride for the mountains as fast as ye can. Let yer horses all be lassoed together, with the red skin in the lead, an' he'll take ye thru all hunkles. When ye get to head-quarters shut the gal up in the cell till I come."

"But what's to become o' you?" Deering demanded.

"Oh! I'll hang around heer a bit longer, an' catch the Humming Bird, and maybe raise the hair of Wild Frank. I'll also try and bleed the cursed Britisher of some of his superfluous cash before I slope for camp."

The plan seemed to strike the three outlaws agreeably, and they signified their acquiescence with nods of approval.

Jim Harris presently arose and sauntered about the room, took a drink at the bar, and watching a proper chance when no one was looking, slipped from the ranch into the wild night without.

Bob Harris and Deering played another game for stakes with the disguised chief, at the conclusion of which the first-named threw down the cards with a vindictive oath, rose from the table and adjourned to the bar.

"Get fixed, eh?" Red River Sam questioned, with a chuckle.

"Cuss my boots, yes—lost every cent," the ruffian growled, pouring out a brimming glass of whisky. "Thet old cuss sez he hails from Californy, but he plays like a cussed city shark."

This shot was intended by the outlaw to throw suspicion from Wyoming Bill, and was in a measure successful. After filling his pipe, Bob also departed, but not until he had hissed in the ear of Humming Bird, who stood near the door:

"Oh! my proud squaw, you shall be mine yet afore ye die. Remember, I've sworn to it, and ye may as well accept the inevitable!"

"Bah! Humming Bird would die before she would marry you!" was the proud reply.

"Thet'll all do to talk," he hissed. "You'll find the difference when I get you in my power." Then he left the ranch.

No particular notice was taken of his or Jim's

departure, as the three pards usually bunked in an old cabin, a few rods from the ranch.

Deering soon followed, and then the disguised outlaw arose from the table with a swagger, and pocketed a large roll of bills.

"I'm thar boss poker-player right up from Californy," he shouted, going up to the bar. "I cleaned out them three cayotes in t'er twinkling uv a lamb's tail, an' thier dust o' thier game's made me thirsty. Will some o' you fellers step up an' lubricate yer machinery wi' prime old red-eye?"

It was an apparently honest invite, but not a man moved to accept.

"I opine, as a rule, we nevver drink wi' strangers, pard, till we know thier name an' pedigree o' thier cuss we moisten with," Red River Sam remarked, in behalf of those present.

"Oh! ye want my measure, do ye?" the outlaw demanded, his eyes emitting a deadly sparkle. "Waal, ef you'll write down ter Copper Flats, Californy, fer a description uv a feller named Jack Turkey, ye'll get a forty-graff o' jest sech a feller as I am, an' ye'll learn his pedigree is famous fer playin' poker, drinkin' red-eye, an' trappin' cinnamon bear."

"Yes, I've hearn o' this Jack Turkey afore," Sam retorted, coolly. "But I'll bot hoes-loads o' nuggets you ain't him."

"What! do you mean to dispute my word?"

"Not but I mean ter jere ye a liar," the veteran scout rejoined. "Ef you're Jack Turkey, ye kin put up a cent-agin' yonder cabin-wall, an' shoot it with a revolver, first pop. Thet's thier kind o' a hangaroo Jack Turkey is!"

The outlaw knew he was caught in a lie, and was silent for a moment, inwardly boiling with rage.

"I can't do et, nor any livin' cuss on earth," he growled. "I'm Jack Turkey, an' I'm dry. Bartender, set out yer prime old toe-tin-gler!"

"Oh! jest hold on," Red River Sam interposed, sneeringly. "Somee ye aire a stranger, we'd really kinder like to know who ye aire, anyhow!"

"I can answer that question, I think, boys," Wild Frank said, stepping forward. "This man is Wyoming Bill, in disguise, and is my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XV.

A DOUBLY BASE DEED.

THE words of the Buckskin Bravo rang out clear and distinct, and as he spoke he sprang forward and shoved a cocked revolver fairly against the outlaw's face.

"Thet's stand!" he continued, sternly. "Throw up your hands, or I'll blow a hole in your head."

Wyoming Bill obeyed, with a baffled oath.

"You lie! I am not the man you say," he expostulated. "Let me alone, or you shall smart for this indignity!"

"Oh! I shall, eh?" Wild Frank replied, calmly. "Well, I don't just happen to agree with you, William. You've been promising me various kinds of death and destruction for the last three years, but it never came. So I concluded to turn the tables, just to see how it would seem."

"I insist that this is all a terrible mistake!" the chief again protested. "Gentlemen, I again appeal to you."

"But appeal in vain," Laughing Len supplemented, producing a piece of lariat with which to bind his hands. "You were never known to listen to the appeals of men, women, and little children, whom you and your red gang of cut-throats have slaughtered, and you needn't expect more, now."

He was securely bound by Len and Eagle Eye, while Wild Frank held him pinned with the revolver. When he was fixed up beyond a possibility of his getting away, and disarmed, Wild Frank put up his revolver.

"We'll see, now, Bill, whether you are not our man. Ah! yes, you look quite familiar. Ha! ha!" and Frank tore off the sandy wig and false beard.

A swarthy, villainous-faced fellow stood revealed, with black hair, mustache and goatee—a man the ugly expression of whose countenance was a sufficient mirror of his evil nature.

"Curses on you!" he breathed, as he stood thus unmasked. "You've won, this time, but your victory will be short-lived, you'll find!"

"Not so short-lived as you'll be, when I send you over to the fort, with my compliments," Wild Frank assured, triumphantly. "Your little proposal for me to join you, I had to decline, Bill, as I wanted you rather more than you wanted me. Is thar any more of your gang, here, to-night?"

"Were there a hundred, you'd not be apt to find it out by n.e," the outlaw assured, with a sneer.

"Oh! I presume not. We'll take good care of you, pet!" the scout said, with sarcasm.

John Papanough had had a strong room built within the ranch, purposely for the accommodation of prisoners, when, as was a frequent occurrence, the U. S. Marshal stopped over night at the ranch, en route for the fort with prisoners. The cell was built of double thickness of logs, and provided with an iron-grated door, to which was attached an intricate lock, to which no one possessed a key except John Papanough himself.

Into this place Wyoming Bill was turned, and the door locked on him, until the blizzard should subside, when it was Laughing Len and Eagle Eye's job to escort him to the nearest military post, and turn him over into the hands of the marshal.

Long was the rejoicing at the ranch the remainder of that stormy night, over the capture of the notorious outlaw and ruffian, whose terrible deeds for three years and over had thrown the surrounding country into a state of dread and fear.

Wild Frank, of course, was the lion of the occasion as being the captor, and was lauded with praise and thanked gen'rally for his daring deed—for it was a deed of daring to face a human tiger of Wyoming Bill's stamp, whose hand was stained with the blood of scores of men.

No thought of further danger seemed to dwell with the rejoicing party until out in the wild storm of the night a piercing scream rang out, and Lord Mt. Morey staggered from the bar where he was standing, with a face as white as death.

"Lillian! my God, some harm is come to my ward!" he cried.

Every man leaped toward the door, and cut into the night, weapons in hand, Wild Frank leading off, with a strange, vengeful cry.

The cabin where the two ladies of the tourist party had been quartered was not a dozen yards from the ranch, and toward it Wild Frank darted through the furious storm accompanied by a dozen of the men.

In almost less time than it takes to relate it, the cabin was reached and entered, and there, lying upon the floor, they found Lady Mt. Morey senseless and with a knife driven through her heart—dead!

Lady Lillian was gone!

"Great God! this is fearful!" Wild Frank cried. "Boys, look to the woman. I'm off after the girl!"

"Stop! it is madness to think of entering the blizzard!" Laughing Len cried.

"Mad or no mad, I'm going to rescue the young lady!" was the fierce reply. "Scar-Face and his infernal gang has done this work, and my mustang will mighty quick pick their trail. If I come back with the girl, all right. If I don't, ye kin look for me in Wyoming Bill's stronghold!"

And as he finished speaking, the intrepid scout leaped forth once more into the howling blizzard, rifle in hand.

Nothing could he see, in the blinding vortex of frozen leathery sleet, but he knew the location of the corral from the cabin, and had little difficulty in reaching it.

A shrill whistle brought his faithful mustang to his side, and he was upon his back, in a jiffy, and dashing off to the north-west, without saddle or bridle, and with his bat under his hunting-shirt, his long hair floating wildly back in the breeze.

A very hurricane was blowing and the stinging particles of frozen rain cut his face until it caused him intense pain, but he never faltered or ceased to urge his faithful animal madly on.

He knew that the outlaw stronghold was somewhere in the mountains, and he knew they would lay their course in that direction.

He had accordingly aimed in a like course, on starting from the ranch.

Well he knew his trusty mustang would not vary an iota from the way he was headed, until guided different, and he therefore never turned his head, but allowed him to keep straight on, feeling confident that he must in a short time overtake the fugitives.

Stygian darkness reigned supreme, in addition to the storm, making it utterly impossible to see ahead.

Fully an hour the scout kept desperately on, hopes of overtaking the savages strong in his breast, but the further he went the more furious raged the storm, and still no signs of success.

As a last resort he finally stopped, and dis-

mounting, felt upon the snow with his hand, moving for some distance right and left. "I'll either find their trail," he muttered, "or lose myself in the blizzard, and perish."

Ten minutes of search elapsed—then he uttered a cry!

He had found where many horses' feet had trodden in the snow, but recently. "Smell, Startle!" he cried, shoving his sagacious mustang's nose into snow. "Now, old boy, follow—or die!"

He remounted, and with his nose close to the ground the mustang leaped away like a bloodhound on the trail.

CHAPTER XVI. A DARING FEAT.

THE surprise upon the two ladies, and the capture of Lady Lily had been sudden and quick, and the poor girl found herself bound hand and foot and in the hands of Jim Harris, almost before she had time to know what was occurring.

While Scar-Face was securing the scalp of Lady M. Morey, Harris bore Lady Lily from the cabin and handed her to his brother Bob, who was upon horseback near the door, as were also Deering and a score of terribly-painted savages.

The whole tragedy did not consume five moments, ere the party were dashing away.

Lady Lily managed to scream, just as they were passing the ranch, but after that Bob Harris held his rough hand closely over her mouth, until they had left the settlement far behind.

"Now, then, my beauty, you can yell if ye want to," he said, taking away his hand, with a brutal laugh. "I reckon tho' the storm kin scream high onto a notch higher than you can."

In utter horror, poor Lady Lily could not utter a sound, but trembled in fear and affright.

The cavalcade moved over the prairie abreast, the mustangs being lariat-ed together through the bits—all except Scar-Face's, who led the way.

It so chanced that Bob Harris was the outer horseman on the left hand, Deering being next, and then the red-skins, Jim Harris having the right end.

Thus they dashed on, at a rapid gallop, the renegade chief keeping only a few yards in advance, and "feeling" the way. Life-long acquaintance with the prairie between Papanough's and the mountains put it in his power, if necessary, to accomplish the whole distance with his eyes shut.

"What are you going to do with me?" Lady Lily finally managed to ask of her ruffianly captor. "Why am I thus taken away from my friends?"

"Waal, as this ain't a night for answerin' riddles, I don't know," Bob Harris replied. "I expect, however, Bill calculates ter make a wife outen you when he gits hum."

"Bill? Who is he, pray?"

"Why, Wyoming Bill, to be sure! Ain't ye never heard of him? Ef ye ain't, it's a wonder, fer he's ther worst outlaw we've got on the border."

"Heaven help me, then! Surely you are not going to place me in the power of such a wretch!"

"Waal, yes, I reckon them's the orders—that is, ef the captain turns up at head quarters."

"Are you outlaws?"

"We have that honor," Bob returned, dryly—then he and Deering laughed, loudly.

On—on dashed the strange cavalcade of storm riders, accomplishing mile after mile of the distance between the settlement and the hills.

Lady Lily grew very cold, as the merciless storm beat against her, but stood it bravely rather than to ask for a share of her rough captor's blanket.

"I reckon ther captain cut his own windpipe, to-night," Deering said, as they rode along.

"Why so?" Bob Harris demanded.

"Because, he'll like as not git inter a row at the ranch. I shouldn't wonder, when I come to think of it, ef Wild Frank spiced him, the way he spoke about a picnic, and ef they were to ever find him out, Bill'd hev a slim chance, I tell you."

"Fshaw! ten to one you'll see him along with us, ere we get to the hills."

"Mebbe—mebbe not," the doctor rejoined.

"Anyhow, if he don't come back, ye can set me down as capt'n."

"It'll likely take more'n one to decide that question. Ef Bill turns up his toes, heer's what turns Mormon, an' marries this gal, an' the Humming Bird, too."

"No women on my plate, ef ye please," Deering answered, sarcastically. "I'd rather hev a mule-load o' sage-bushes tied to my back."

"That's whar we can't agree!" was Bob's rejoinder.

"I pray to God that the noble scout, Wild Frank, may come to my rescue," Lady Lily breathed, shuddering as she contemplated her fate if not taken from the power of these mountain outlaws.

"Waal, ye needn't hope in that direction," Harris chuckled, "fer Wild Frank don't come nosin' around the hills arter us, fearin' he'll git shot."

"I don't believe he is capable of fear—he is so brave and dauntless."

"Waal, ye jest chaw on et, my gal—his bravery won't never to ye be no good."

Then there was another long pause in conversation, during which the wind shrieked more horribly and the biting storm tore over the prairie with redoubled fury.

"Hark!" Deering suddenly cried. "I thought I heard a yell. I'll bet a copper the capt'n is after us!"

"Yas, probably," Harris grunted. "I allowed he'd found it too warm at the ranch for comfort."

A horse's hoof-strokes distinguishable from those of the cavalcade, were plainly heard, and soon after a horseman dashed along a few yards to the left of Bob Harris. Who he was the ruffian could not have told, however, had he been only a few feet from his face, owing to the density of the whirling flakes.

"Hello! is it you, Bill?" Deering howled through his hands, above the shriek of the storm.

"Blazes, yes!" was the hoarse, gruff reply, as the horseman drew nearer. "Hev ye got the gal all safe?"

"Yes; heer she is! Whar's Humming Bird?" Bob Harris bellowed.

"At Papanough's. I barely got cut 'er the cussed place with my life. Wild Frank opened on me, an' I knifed him and skipped. Let me hev the gal. I've got a blanket fer her."

"I'm cussed glad ye want her," Bob Harris cried, "fer she's heavy."

Then, in the midst of the blinding flurry, the new-comer galloped alongside and took Lady Lily in his arms, and at the same time Bob Harris received a blow alongside the head that caused him to grow dizzy.

"Thunder and lightning! what d'ye mean by hitting me!" he roared.

There was no answer.

Lady Lily's new captor had wheeled his horse abruptly and disappeared like a flash over the back trail.

"What's the rip?" Deering demanded, as Harris swore frightfully.

"Matter!" the ruffian roared. "Why, blast it, the capt'n snatched the gal, punched me beside the head and's gone!"

"Furies! It wasn't the captain! He'd never do that. We've been overtaken by Wild Frank and robbed of our prize!" Deering yelled.

It was even so! The Buckskin Bravo had hunted down the outlaws, rode up to them, and cunningly obtained possession of the girl, and even as the outlaws came to a halt to talk, he was skimming away through the storm, over the back trail, his faithful mustang leaping along as if he knew and felt the triumph of the victory.

Lady Lily could not see the face of her new captor, so furious was the storm, but she felt that she could not have fallen into worse hands than she had been rescued from.

"Who are you, sir?" she asked, as they dashed along. "Surely you are not the terrible outlaw chief?"

"Oh, no!" the brave scout answered, as he freed her hands and feet, so that she could ride easier. "I am one who would go through fire and water to win your humblest smile. I am Wild Frank."

"Then, God be praised, I am safe!" she cried, and, impetuously throwing her arms about his neck, she kissed him upon his bare, broad forehead, again and again.

"Yes, you are safe, and I am happy," the Bravo replied, pillowing her head against his breast. "We are not entirely out of danger yet, however, for the settlement is far away. We may not be able to find it, and would perish in the storm."

"If you perish, I will not survive you," she said, hugging closer to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOX.

CONTRARY to the scout's expectation, they had no difficulty in reaching the settlement, owing

to the mustang's sagacity and determination, and were safely in the ranch before it was morning.

No one was up but the Humming Bird, all the rest having retired for the night, but she welcomed them back with a quiet grace which Frank knew was forced, and prepared them some venison and warm sing to lace them up, after their long and desperate ride.

Lord Mt. Morey had already retired for the night, in one of the many rooms of the ranch, together with Slick and Ratlie, leaving their footman to watch over the remains of her lacy-ship, in the cabin near by.

After thanking Wild Frank ever and over again, warmly, Lady Lily signified her desire to retire for the remainder of the night, and was shown to a sleeping apartment on the second floor by Humming Bird, who returned to the bedroom, where the Buckskin Bravo sat with bowed head, gazing thoughtfully into the fire upon the hearth, his hat thrown off, and long hair rippling down over his shoulder in a brown wave.

"The scout's thoughts are—where?" the half-breed girl asked, approaching him and laying her hand upon his head. "He thinks not of present scenes and things."

"Right," Frank answered, looking up with a smile. "My mind's eye was then looking into the past, and then into the far future, in wonderment and mystification, Birdie."

"Indeed," the Humming Bird replied, a trifle bitterly, as she drew a stool beside him and became seated. "In the past you saw the true, faithful love of a humble, all-true girl—in the future you saw a pleasant home and fire-side, with little children playing at your feet, but it was not the half-breed girl who sat by your side. No! it was the proud, pretty woman you periled your life for to-night."

There were tears in her eyes as she finished speaking, and, touched at her grief, Wild Frank put his arm around her waist and drew her to him, imprinting a kiss upon her dusky forehead.

"There, little sister, do not take it so to heart," he said, softly. "Your imagination is excited to-night, just the least little bit jealous. And why? Did I do more in rescuing Lady Lily, than I have been doing all my life on the border?"

"No, perhaps not, but you won her love, anyhow, and you love her yourself—you cannot deny either of those charges, sir."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. I will not deny a growing affection for her, Birdie. No stronger is it, however, than my brotherly regard for you. But, as to reciprocation on the part of a great and titled lady like her, I cannot say—I cannot dare to hope for it."

"You would marry her, then, if she were to consent?"

"I do not know. The thought of matrimony has been the least of all my life troubles. Perhaps if she were to consent, I should accept of an alliance—with your permission."

Humming Bird was silent, her face buried in her pretty hands, her bosom heaving with emotion.

"If you can be happy with her I will not hinder you," she said, finally. "I am going to retire, now. When you get ready, you know where you usually sleep."

She then arose and left the room. Wild Frank did not retire, at once. He picked up the fire, and sat down again in its bright light, and took from his hunting sack the little ebony box he had brought from the lone prairie grave.

It was a pretty little tin box about four inches square, and the corners were bound with gold brackets.

For several minutes the scout seemed undecided whether to open it or not, but finally he touched a tiny spring, and the lid flew open.

The inside was lined with satin, fancifully quilted in colors, and contained a document tied with a silken string, and three likenesses.

These Wild Frank proceeded to examine, critically.

One was of a young man, of some five-and-twenty years—a dark, handsome fellow, with a kindly expressed face, dark hair and mustache, and plain but tasty attire.

The second was a woman perhaps a couple of years younger—a fair, fresh-faced lady with brilliant eyes, sunny hair, and good-natured expression—a woman plainly a fitting companion for the man, with purity and faith engraven in the countenance.

The third likeness was of a sweet little two-year-old girl, and Wild Frank recognized it with a low cry.

It was the picture of the same child he had adopted, on the prairies, years before, of the

wounded stranger—of the same loved one whose grave he had visited and opened, earlier in the evening.

Laying aside the pictures, he took the paper from the casket, and opened it.

It was written in a graceful business hand, and read as follows:

"Mrs. Prairie, November —, 189—.

"To whomsoever it may come:

"This is to certify that the giver of this box, Sir Ralph Revere of London, England, has reached this wild, desolate prairie, with his little child, Lillian, an outcast and wanderer in a strange land, through the villainy of an unknown enemy, and the alleged faithlessness of a wife, whose picture had here with my own and my child's. I cannot believe my darling unfaithful, now, but it is too late. Something seems to tell me that it was all a villainous scheme of Mt. Morey's, to drive me from the country. Something also seems to tell me that I am not long for this world. I am footsore, weary and hungry. God have mercy on my little child if I fall by the way! I will write this and put it in the ebony box, where some one may find it after I am dead. If my child survives me, I pray that whoever finds her will take her and rear her carefully, teaching her to love her God, and grow up to be a good and useful woman. I also pray that the finder will do me another last favor. Write to London, put detectives on the track, and find if the wife of Sir Ralph Revere was faithful to him. If so, restore my little Lillian to her mother's care, and tell her that it was Mt. Morey who drove me away by villainous lies, and it is at Mt. Morey's door my death can be laid. I will go now, and see if I can catch some fish to appease my hunger, and my poor babe's. May God grant me success.

RALPH REVERE."

That was all, but it was a wonderful revelation—and one that confirmed something of a theory Wild Frank had formed since the tourist party had camped on the prairies.

"The conversation I overheard between the Frenchman and Lady Lily is now explained. She is occupying a false position!" he muttered, passing his hand across his forehead. "She is not the rightful Lady Lillian Revere, as she hopes—for the real child of Sir Ralph was laid in her last resting-place by me, five years ago, in the grave yonder where the storm hides riot. Poor Lily! She told Rablee she would kill herself if she should prove to be some nameless waif. But she must never know the truth, if that is the case."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIT FOR TAT.

The blizzard which had struck that section of Wyoming Territory, continued to howl and rage until the middle of the fourth day, when it abated as suddenly as it had begun, and the sun shone once more brightly. A great depth of snow had fallen however, and it was worth a man's life to attempt wallowing across the prairies, to any given point, the fleecy body of white averaging fully seven feet in depth on the level.

Lady Mt. Morey had been temporarily interred near the scene of her murder, on the second day, and since then things had passed without noteworthy incident at the ranch, for snowed up as they were, the inmates could do little or nothing but eat, drink and sleep, unless it was to play cards.

Wild Frank was much in the society of Lady Lily, and it was apparent to more than one observer that the intimacy between the two was fast ripening into an earnest mutual affection.

Lord Mt. Morey looked on with savage displeasure, but said nothing, for, while he feared the dauntless Duckskin Bravo, he was also under obligations to him for saving Lady Lily, and was shrewd enough not to aggravate an existing enmity with a man whose power seemed as undisputed as Wild Frank's.

"Let them go ahead with their billing and cooing," he said to the count, who looked on with burning jealousy. "It will get nipped in the bud, directly. I am daily expecting to hear from a person who will produce Ralph Rivers, and when he identifies the girl, and Walsingham pays me over the sum of one hundred thousand pounds sterling, we will take the girl and light out for Australia. That will dissolve the love-match."

"But ze danger, my lord—you do not consider ze danger. Ze concumination may occur at ze shortest notice."

"Bah! no danger, yet. The girl knows her business. If she gets the heritage and is proven the heiress, then you can rest assured she'll feel too far above the Indian-fighter to even wipe her feet upon him. If she should not be established, she might be fool enough to wed the long-haired vagabond, if I didn't, as her guardian, veto the match."

"Is it certain she will be established? What if Revere shall not identify?"

"Leave that to me to arrange," the elder villain said, with a chuckle. "I've broken refractory people before this."

And thus the matter rested.

Mt. Morey did not deign to notice the Bravo, and Edwidge took good care to keep at a proper distance from him.

Wild Frank had encouraged Jack De Hearn, a well-to-do young herder, to pay lover-like attentions to the Humming Bird, and the fellow had done so with a will, a result of which was that the pretty half-breed girl grew to love once more her gay, happy self.

No sooner had the blizzard abated, than the sun broke forth with springtime's warmth, and the weather moderated until the snow began to rapidly disappear from the prairie.

By the next morning it had so far melted away that the crests of the prairie billows once more showed their color of brown, and it was safe to venture forth on horseback.

Wyoming Bill was then brought from his cell, and mounted upon a horse, preparatory for his trip to the military post, in charge of Wild Frank's pard, Laughing Len. Eagle Eye, Red River Sam, and Jack De Hearn also went along as escort, for it was two days' ride to the post, and there might be an attempt on the part of the outlaws to rescue their chief, and save him from the fate that surely awaited him in the hands of the authorities.

Soon after their departure, the other transient storm-bound visitors took leave, and the ranch was left weak-handed.

Only John Papanauah, his sister, Wild Frank, and the tourists were left at the ranch, to defend it in case of an attack, except the herders of the settlement, whose cabins were scattered about at various distances. Still, there was no particular danger of an attack, unless it should come from the reds associated with Wyoming Bill's gang, and it looked probable they would lay low, as it was known that the United States cavalry at the post was ready to take their trail at a moment's notice.

During the day Wild Frank scouted about the prairie, but saw no signs of invaders, and returned to the ranch, and spent the remainder of the day in Lady Lily's society.

About supper time he met by chance with Lord Mt. Morey, outside the ranch, and the latter paused to speak, seeing which intention, the scout halted also.

"I wish to say to you, young man," his lordship began, impressively, "that your attentions to my ward, are extremely obnoxious to her, and a discontinuance of the same will be thankfully received by both her and myself."

"Oh! is that so?" Wild Frank replied, with sarcasm. "Well, sir, I dare to presume that when my attentions become unbearable, the young lady will kindly inform me of the fact."

"But she is very sensitive about wounding one's feelings, or she would have long ago dismissed you!" his lordship protested, angrily.

"Well, when I get to see by any hint that my presence is objectionable, I will quit," the scout replied coolly. "I have taken a great interest in her, sir, and I shall take care that your villainous game never brings her to harm."

"My villainous game, sir? What do you mean?" and up came the baronet's formidable cane, threateningly.

"Oh! you can put down your stick," Frank returned, with provoking calmness. "You are probably aware I am not easily scared, sir—a long life in the backwoods has made me owl-proof—to modify an old saying. You are playing a game, Mt. Morey, and a desperate game too, which you are not going to win."

"What know you about my business, sir?" the schemer demanded, fiercely.

"More than you think," was the quiet reply. "In fact, I know nearly all. See! do you recognize that?" and he held up the likeness of baby Lillian Revere within a yard of his lordship's face.

"A thousand curses! Where did you get that?" he cried, grabbing for it, but without success. "Tell me, man, how came you in possession of that likeness of her?"

"None of your business, sir. I'll bid you good-by, and leave you to imagine the rest. Hal! hal! Success to you!"

And with a laugh the Bravo passed into the ranch.

For the moment the baronet stood gazing after him, speechless and livid with rage.

"Curses on his soul!" he gritted, clenching his hands until the nails cut the flesh.

"I hated the fellow from the moment I first

saw him, and now I have a cause. But, ah! he'll find his supposed triumph over me is short-lived!"

He hastily sought Count de Rablee, and drew him one side.

"Sal!" he uttered in a husky whisper. "Arm yourself with a sure powder, to night, and manage to drop it into Wild Frank's coffee."

"Why?" the chemist demanded, in surprise.

"Because, we must be rid of him. He knows the whole secret!"

"No!"

"Yes. Will you do this for me?"

"I will guarantee my rival never sees tomorrow's sun rise," the Parisian assured, showing his teeth in a horrible grin.

Mt. Morey turned away then, with a feeling of relief.

Just at dusk he lit a cigar, and took a stroll outside, in the early gloaming.

He had not gone five steps ere he came face to face with a masked man!

CHAPTER XIX.

A DASTARD'S ATTEMPT.

It took but a glance for the lord to recognize him as his visitor of several evenings before—for it was in reality Dr. Deering, in disguise.

"Hello! I was watching for you," he said.

"Come along out of sight, if you want to talk business."

Mt. Morey obeyed, for he was even more eager to arrange matters than the renegade, who led the way to a secluded little valley, near the ranch.

Here they paused, and became seated upon the grass, Deering filling and lighting a pipe.

"Now, to begin with, what will you give me to produce this man Revere?" he asked. "Money is money with me, and business is business. If you come down, in good shape, I'm your man. If you don't, I'm off again."

"I'll give you five thousand dollars, if you will bring him before me, and my ward, and cause him to swear, in the presence of others, that, according to his best belief the girl is his own daughter."

"That would be impossible," Deering averred. "Revere hates me worse than an Indian does a rattlesnake, and I could not persuade him to do anything like that. All I can do is produce him, which I will do for ten thousand."

"I do not want him unless he can be persuaded to identify the girl. I will give you a hundred dollars to take him a prisoner and deliver him to me at some given point not far from here, where I can induce him, by coaxing or by force, to accede to my wishes."

"Oh! no. You are just nine thousand and nine hundred dollars below my terms," the doctor declared, decidedly. "I'll give you five minutes to decline or accept."

"I do not need that time," his lordship responded emphatically. "I decline, forthwith. I am not a bank on which you can draw, at will."

"But you are a dainty little game bird such as I occasionally make it a point to pluck. Ha! ha!" and with a wicked laugh, the renegade drew and cocked a formidable revolver, and leveled it at Mt. Morey's head. "If you will be so kind and accommodating, my royal British luck, I'd like to have you hand over your plethoric purse, and your chronometer, diamond ring, pin, and such other wallybles as you may chance to have."

"What! you are not such a villain that you would rob me!" his lordship gasped, in genuine alarm.

"I am sorry that necessity so compels me to violate the biblical commandments," was the cynical reply. "But such, unfortunately for you, is the case. Either you must give me the cosey little sum of ten thousand dollars for delivering up to you one certain pilgrim named Ralph Revere, or I shall have to relieve you of such lucre as you carry about your estimable person, and run the risk of getting as much."

"I'll see you in Iceland before I'll yield to your demand, sir!"

"And I'll see you in a place of extremely opposite temperature if I ever show you the man you want," Deering chuckled. "Throw up your hands and let me go through you, or I'll put a bullet into your cranium, and then strip you."

Mt. Morey obeyed with a bitter curse. He did not for a moment doubt that the renegade would be prompt to execute his threat, if provoked, and his valuation of life, as compared with what valuables he had about his person, was great.

Deering proceeded with his search in a systematic way which showed he had served an

apprenticeship at it. And after he had secured all that was of any particular value to him, he turned to leave:

"By by, John Bull!" he said. "Go back to the island and tell your countrymen how you came over to see the elephant, and found him tew home!"

He then backed out of the valley, keeping Mt. Morey covered, until the hill hid him from view.

His lordship went back to the ranch and sought his room, where he could curse himself unmolested. He had lost about three thousand dollars in money, besides a handsome watch and other jewelry.

"Boiled again!" he hissed, pacing the floor like a caged lion. "But, by Heaven, I will fight it out on this line till I win or lose all. If Ralph Revere is in this country, alive, I will find him and make him answer my purpose. To that I solemnly swear."

Shortly after his meeting with Mt. Morey, Wild Frank entered the supper-room of the ranch to get his evening's rations, which were being prepared.

As he did so he saw Rablee in the act of dropping something into his (Frank's) cup of coffee, which had already been placed upon the table.

Suspecting his horrible intention, the Buckskin Bravo whipped his revolver from his belt with a lightning movement, and fired, the bullet shattering the treacherous Frenchman's wrist, and causing him to leap about and yell lustily.

The supper room was the scene of confusion in an instant.

John Papanauah accompanied by several herders rushed in, armed with rifles, and were followed almost instantly by Humming Bird and Lady Lily.

"What is the matter?" John Papanauah demanded of Frank. "Who fired that shot?"

"I am the man," the Bravo replied, composedly. "I entered this room just in time to detect yonder howling coyote in the act of putting something in my coffee. Suspecting his devilish design, I shot him through the wrist."

"How is this?" Papanauah demanded, fiercely, drawing a revolver, and advancing toward Da Rablee. "Explain, sir, or I'll finish the job Wild Frank has just begun."

"It is all ze grande mistake," the Parisian chattered, between groans of pain, his face deathly pale. "Ze mi-lord bilious, and he told me to prepare ze proper remedy, and put it in his coffee, at ze end of ze table. I do sit, when ze ruffin shoot me in ze wrist with ze pistol."

"Is this true?" Papanauah demanded, turning to Mt. Morey, who had entered just in time to overhear what had been said.

"Of course it is true, only the devilish fool has made a mistake in the end of the table where I sit," his lordship lied, unblushingly.

"This may all seem plausible to the rest of you, but I do not feel inclined to swallow it, no more than would I yonder coffee," Wild Frank replied. "If it is true that what his Frenchness dropped into the coffee was simply a remedy for biliousness—then perhaps he will not object to drinking the cup of coffee to satisfy my suspicion of foul play."

"Pshaw! this is nonsense!" Mt. Morey protested, blusteringly.

"Zis is utter madness," Rablee added. "Ze remedy cure biliousness, but be sure death to any person zat is not afflicted with ze ailment. I am in ze most perfect health—*mon dieu*, it would be ze death of me!" and he looked all the horror he knew how.

"Your story is weak," Wild Frank said. "But, I'll give you one more chance. Let the one drink the coffee for whom it was prepared. If it does not kill him, I'll drop the matter, here."

"Curse, no!" Mt. Morey cried. "I have quite recovered from my attack, and it would kill me, of course."

"Presumably!" the Buckskin Bravo retorted. "Your disease evidently was short lived." Then turning to Rablee he added: "And to you, sir, I'll give one hour to forever leave this vicinity. If I ever catch sight of you, after that I'll cut your treacherous heart out!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE BIRD AND THE VULTURE.

"WILD FRANK big fool!" John Papanauah said, growlingly. "Ought to kill and scalp the snake on the spot."

"No!" the scout said, calmly, "for it has always been my rule to give an enemy a chance for his life. As I would disdain to cross weapons with yonder wretch, I'll do the next best thing—give him a chance for his life, safe y

promising him that if he ever crosses my path again, it shall be his death-signal. Go, sir—make haste, lest I be tempted to kill you on the spot!"

A window was open at Rablee's elbow, and without waiting for a second invitation, he leaped through it and disappeared, glad, no doubt, to escape with his life.

"And now, as for you," Wild Frank said, facing Mt. Morey, "whom I believe to be implicated in this cowardly attempt on my life, I shall extend to you the warning to not get nearer to me than five feet, lest I slap your mouth for you, and thus necessitate an affair of honor, in which I would come up missing."

He then turned and strode to the bar-room, as though nothing had happened.

Mt. Morey took advantage of the chance afforded him, and returned to his room, where once more he paced the floor in a state of baffled fury that knew no bounds.

Wild Frank retired early that night, for it was his intention to take a ride to the mountains early the following morning, for a purpose which he alone knew.

In fact, every one within the ranch retired earlier than usual except Humming Bird, who sat up after the rest had retired to talk with her new suitor, stalwart handsome Jack de Herne.

It was nearly midnight ere the herder took leave, and the pretty half-breed girl accompanied him to the door to say good-night as he strode across the prairie to his own cabin.

She stood thus in the doorway, the cool evening breeze blowing her luxuriant hair, until his footsteps had grown inaudible, and was about turning to re-enter the ranch, when she heard a faint cry.

With a start, she stopped breathing for an instant, and went forward in an attitude of listening. The cry had not sounded more than a dozen yards away.

"Birdie! help! help!" she now heard, distinctly, a little further off.

"Something has happened to Jack," she gasped, and ran swiftly out on the prairie in the direction of the cry, not stopping to consider.

And, scarcely a rod had she gone, when a man sprang up from behind a little prairie knoll and seized her.

She instantly recognized him as being Bob Harris, and uttered a shrill scream of alarm. With an oath, he sprang away, with her in his arms, holding a hand over her mouth.

Her scream had been the signal for two score of red-skins to leap from the grass, and surround the ranch with hideous war-cries, and a fierce attack was made upon the cabin door, which had been slammed shut, and barred, just in time to prevent their entering.

It was Wild Frank who had done this, just in the nick of time. He had heard Humming Bird's scream, leaped from his couch of skins and down the stairs all in almost an instant; he saw the swarm of dusky forms out on the prairie, and shut and barred the door in another instant.

He was already dressed, as luck would have it, not having undressed on retiring, and, seizing his trusty rifle, he took a place at one of the loop-holes, on the defensive.

He was speedily joined by John Papanauah, who came tumbling down the stairs more asleep than awake.

"What's the matter?" he cried, intuitively seizing his rifle, and rubbing his eyes.

"The matter is that Birdie's gone, and we're surrounded by reds," Frank replied.

And, even as he spoke the Indians without commenced a fierce attack upon the door of the cabin with their tomahawks.

"You hear?" the scout continued, grimly.

"They mean business, and there's only six of us in the ranch, four of whom cannot be depended on. It remains for us two to—*work!*"

Papanauah nodded understandingly. He was fully awake now, and gripped his rifle with savage determination.

Several shots were fired, but were only answered by derisive yells. They did not reach the savage attackers.

"We must manage to reach them from some other source, before they get the door down, or our game is up," Frank declared, anxiously.

"Me got it fixed," the half-breed replied, as he pointed to two plugs, one of which was driven slant-wise into either door-post the slant being toward each other, and pointing to a center without, opposite the center of the door.

"Pull plugs out, and find loop-holes."

This was accordingly done, and a literal volley fired upon the horde of savages around the door, followed by another and another as fast

as the two defenders could manipulate their repeating rifles.

It was not cries of derision that now answered their fire, but yells of mortal pain, and of rage, and there was a general stampede from the vicinity of the door, followed by a brooding stillness, without.

Lady Lily came down-stairs, now, carrying a light sporting rifle, of handsome finish.

"Am I too late?" she cried, gayly. "I'm sure I could hit one of the savage brutes."

"We've scattered 'em, for the present," Wild Frank replied, smiling. "You may possibly have an opportunity yet, before the night is over. Where is his lordliness?"

"In the hallway, above, crouching in one corner like a scared peewee," Lady Lily replied. "I wouldn't be such a timid goose as he is, for the world."

For nearly an hour the quiet continued, and not a sign of the enemy could be seen or heard.

"I reckon they've gone, for good," Papanauah said.

"Don't fool yourself. They'll not give up without another attack," the Buckskin Bravo replied. "Ah! didn't I tell you!"

A loud chorus of yells now pealed forth, on all sides of the cabin.

They had surrounded it.

"Now, then, each one take a loop-hole, and watch for a painted head," Frank said, and accordingly three sides of the cabin were taken and guarded.

After the series of yells, all again became quiet without.

What the reds were doing was unknown to the three defenders, for nothing could be seen of them, for upward of an hour.

Then Wild Frank discovered them, mounted upon their ponies, and riding swiftly toward the north through the moonlight.

The cause of their flight soon became apparent, as a band of mountain herders dashed past the cabin in hot pursuit.

The danger was over.

A consultation was now held, and Wild Frank declared his intention of going in quest of Humming Bird.

"Before you go," Lady Lily said, leading him to one side. "I want you to tell me what you know about me."

"About you?" Frank asked, feigning surprise.

"Yes, about me. I accidentally overheard the words between you and Mt. Morey, tonight, as you stood outside the cabin, and am positive that you know whether I am the real Lillian Revere or not. If you do know, for Heaven's sake tell me, and relieve me of an awful suspense."

"I will tell you all, on condition that you will consent to be my wife, on my return from finding Humming Bird," the scout said, earnestly. "I have grown to love you sincerely, since meeting you, and trust you will give my honest affection encouragement."

"I do not deny a strong love for you, Wild Frank," was the slow reply, as she gazed up into his eyes, "and if I am really Lillian Revere, I will gladly give you my hand. But if I am some nameless outcast, picked up by Mt. Morey, I will never wed any man—I will kill myself and end my misery!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEDICINE WOMAN REVEALED.

"THAT would be very wrong," the scout answered, taking her slender hands in his strong ones. "To throw away a life because you could not command a title, would be utter nonsense, especially when you would have a true and faithful protector in me."

"Then am I not the real Lillian Revere?" she demanded, wildly. "It must be so, or you would not talk that way."

"Pshaw! Do not get excited. I cannot answer your question until my return, when I may possibly bring Sir Ralph Revere with me, and also his wife."

"Oh! do not! They will denounce me as a fraud and impostor."

"Maybe not. If they should, you know to whom you may fly for love and protection, through life."

"No! no! Gladly will I accept your offer, Wild Frank, if I can come to you in bridal with a title and plenty of money, but never will I wed you, knowing that I am some nameless waif of the streets of London, picked up by Mt. Morey to further his mercenary schemes. I would rather go away to some lonely spot and lay down and die, in the consciousness that I was guiltless of casting my humble lot with a man of noble nature like you."

"Well, when I return, I do not think you will have cause for a moment to consider such a rash move. By-by, now! A lover's kiss, and then I am merrily off over the prairies to the rescue of the Humming Bird."

The kisses were exchanged between this strangely contrasted pair; then Wild Frank left the ranch, prodded his horse, and was soon galloping away toward the horizon-west, through the waning moonlight.

He did not follow the trail of the red-skins, who, with their pursuers, had disappeared from view down a decline in the prairie, but struck off in a course which experience had taught him was a nearer route to the hills.

An hour's swift ride brought him to the foothills of a rocky range, and he entered the same gulch that the Humming Bird had entered a few nights previous, and was soon standing at the mouth of the singular aperture where she had stood.

"Hello!" he challenged, through the hole. "Spirit Medicine woman, ahoy!"

"What's wanted and who calls?" was the almost immediate answer in an unearthly and sepulchral tone.

"It is I, Wild Frank, the scout," the Buckskin Bravo answered. "I have come to beg a person I and immediate interview with the Spirit Medicine Woman."

"Impossible!" was the reply. "Earthly beings can never gain access to the realms of departed spirits until after death."

"Pshaw! enough of nonsense," Wild Frank returned impatiently. "If you are the one who fifteen years ago was the wife of Sir Ralph Revere, in London, for Heaven's sake let me in, as I have something of vital importance to communicate."

"What cause have you for imagining me to be Lady Revere?" the secret medicine woman demanded.

"Because I have pictures of yourself, your husband and child, and have seen your face on one or more occasions during my rambles over in the mountains," was the scout's prompt answer.

Following which there was a silence of several minutes' duration.

So long did it continue that Wild Frank grew impatient, and once more applied his mouth to the aperture.

"Well, are you going to admit me or not?" he asked.

"Yes, follow me," a voice said at his elbow, and turning he beheld a matronly looking woman of some fifty years standing near him.

She was attired in a dress of buckskin, and wore her hair down over her shoulders. Her eyes were brown, and her face, though furrowed by time and his neighbor, sorrow, still bore traces of an early beauty.

She led the way down the steps, up the gulch a few yards, and into a black fissure in the rocks, which barely admitted the passage of their bodies. Following the fissure a short distance, they suddenly emerged into a cavern of considerable size, which was lighted by a ruddy fire burning in the center.

A few rude stools, touches of skins, a rough table, and some pots and kettles comprised the furniture, with the exception of a rifle.

Upon one of the couches of furs, near the fire, reclined a man, who arose upon his elbow as the medicine woman entered, accompanied by the Buckskin Bravo.

It required but a glance from the scout's eagle eye to recognize him as the lunatic, Angel Gabriel.

"Be seated," the woman said, "and state your errand."

"I will do so. Are you the wife of Sir Ralph Revere?"

"I am," was the reply.

"And this man is—"

"My husband, sir."

"I thought as much, when I saw him a few nights ago. He is laboring under insanity, is he not?"

"No, for, thanks to this good Samaritan, I have fully recovered, so that all is clear to me, and I recognize you!" Sir Ralph said, rising and extending his hand. "You, sir, are the one to whom I consigned my two-year-old child, on that November night, fifteen years ago, are you not?"

"I am Wild Frank, yes, and received such a child. But you were dead ere I left you."

"No, not dead—only in a swoon, superinduced by the faintness caused by my arm, and want of food. I afterward recovered, but bereft of reason to some extent."

"And you?" the scout said, turning to Lady Revere—"can you favor me with the facts of

this strange life romance in which I have had a hand?"

"I can," was the reply, "for I have compared stories with my husband, and we thoroughly understand how basely we have been wronged by the villainy of another. But tell me—is Lord Mt. Morey here in the West, as I have heard?"

"There is such a man now at Papanau's Ranch," Wild Frank replied, respectfully.

"And is he accompanied by a young woman whom he claims is our child—mine and Sir Ralph's?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then, what we most want to know—is that our Lillian? You, sir, should know, into whose care my husband placed the little thing fifteen years ago."

Wild Frank did not answer immediately. He was suddenly assailed with a temptation to declare the one he loved so dearly to be the right and only Lillian Revere.

What harm could it be? No one but he and Mt. Morey would know different, perhaps, and it might save a life. Then his thoughts reverted to the little prairie grave, and a feeling of exquisite sadness stole over him.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BITTER REVELATION.

"You do not answer," Sir Ralph said. "What are we to infer by your silence? that our child is living or dead?"

"She is dead," Wild Frank replied, gravely "and lies buried upon the prairie but a few miles from here. After you gave her to me, I took her to my solitary mountain home, and there carefully reared her until she became a pretty, healthful little maiden, of sweet disposition and winning ways. I taught her as much as I knew how, and bought her books to read, when at the settlements, so that she was soon able to turn about and teach me. She never left the cabin further than to seek a neighboring peak which commanded a view of the broad prairies, and when she died, of a sudden fever, she requested me to place her grave down in the prairie. I fulfilled her wish, and placed a marble slab at her head, to mark her last resting-place. She was as dear to me as if she were in reality my own child, and her death cast a deep gloom over my life."

"How long ago did she die?"

"Nearly five years. I never examined the contents of the box you gave me, until a few nights since."

There was a short silence, and then Lady Revere said:

"I will now relate my story, and we will compare notes. According to my husband, previous to his flight from England, Lord Mt. Morey prejudiced him against me by a lying report that I was in love with him—Mt. Morey—and no longer wished to be tied to my own husband. This was the cause of Sir Ralph's flight. I learned it afterward from Mt. Morey, who taunted me with the fact. About the same time my husband left London, I was sent word that he was dangerously hurt, and lying in a private hospital in another part of London. Leaving my child in charge of my French nurse, I hastened to the place, suspecting no evil until too late, when I found myself incarcerated in a private mad-house, hopelessly insane, they said. Maybe I was, at times—it seemed to me I should go crazy. In due time Mt. Morey called upon me, and offered to secure my release if I would marry him before I saw the outside of my dungeon. I refused him, of course. Again and again he came with his offer, and as many times I scornfully repulsed him, until one day, in a taunting mood, he told me how he had been the projector of one of the most devilish plots ever concocted, the result of which you already can see—my husband driven from England, and I placed in an asylum. The object he said was to get possession of some money which he first believed had fallen to me, but later learned was willed to my child. After that his visits ceased for a time, until one day he visited me in company with another man, and asked me if a little girl, whom he had also brought along, was my child, winking at me as much as to say that if I would identify the child as mine, he would liberate me."

"Of course I denied the child, emphatically, and they left. After that I was not visited by any one except my keepers. Nearly a year I remained in the mad-house; then I escaped. You may rest assured it was the happiest day of my life. In a secluded part of London I went to work, until I had accumulated enough money to defray my expenses to America. Here I came, in search of my husband and child, praying God to assist me to find them."

Knowing he had always talked much of Western America, I came to the West in search of him. For twelve years I roamed through the States and Territories as an Indian medicine woman, ever on the search. I had a knowledge of medicine, and by experience acquired more."

"Twelve years without success. Two years ago, I ran across Sir Ralph, as I believe, and called him a lunatic. I brought him here, and worked over him to restore his mind, but when I was just beginning to have hopes, he disappeared, and I did not see him again for months. Thus four times did I run across him and he escape me. A few nights ago, I found him wounded, upon the prairie, and brought him hither, and by the grace of God I have succeeded in bringing back his full reason."

"You are a noble woman," the scout said, heartily, "and he who ever watches over us will ever after guide you into a happy pathway. I feel sorry for one person—the poor misled girl who has been taught to suppose that she was Lillian Revere. She is a noble, sweet-hearted girl, and my only wish is that she might always be led, in the future as in the past, to suppose that she is really your daughter."

"If she is such a pure, noble girl as you describe, I see no reason why we should mar her young life by not claiming her, as our own, so long as our own child is dead," Sir Ralph said, turning to Lady Revere.

"I will not object, dear husband, for I have eyes keen enough to see that our true and tried friend here, Wild Frank, who cared for our poor Lillian, is in love with this false heiress, and I feel that we ought to reward him. But should we claim her, Mt. Morey, out of spite, would be likely to give the whole deception away."

"That can be arranged," Wild Frank said. "In your name I will have him seized and taken to the post, charged with the several criminal acts. You, Sir Ralph, can then visit him and offer him his liberty if he will forever quit the country and give up his game."

"By no means! I shall seek him as soon as I am able and challenge him to meet me with swords," the baronet said, sternly, "and if I am half as good a man as I once was, I can forever settle our account. I should never rest easy otherwise."

"Do as you like about that, sir. I must now bid you adieu, for I have a mission in the mountains that demands my attention. I suppose I will see you next at the settlement."

"Yes. We shall probably go there to face our old foe to-morrow," Sir Ralph responded.

He then showed Wild Frank from the cavern, and the scout set off on horseback into the mountains.

He did not know the exact location of the outlaw's rendezvous, but was resolved to search for it until he found it, if it took a month.

He rode along the gulch until he came to a transverse gulch. Here he dismounted and picked his horse.

He had scarcely done so ere a score of painted red-skins sprang up from the shelter of various trees and rocks and surrounded him with yells of victory.

Drawing his revolver the intrepid scout began a deadly fire to their midst, and full half their number lay outstretched upon the ground ere he was forced to submit to overpowering odds.

"Ah! so we've caught you at last, eh?" a triumphant voice cried, as the red devils were lining him, and Jim Harris stepped into view. "I allow we'll have a roast up at camp now. D'ye hear, devil scout, we're going to roast ye alive!"

"Roast and be hanged," was the defiant answer of the Buckskin Bravo.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE HUMAN TIGER'S DEN.

WITHOUT further delay, a thick bandage was placed before Wild Frank's eyes, and he was marched off between a group of his red captors.

Not a word was spoken, only the sound of many footfalls awakening the echoes of the rocky ravine.

It was fully an hour, as near as the scout could judge, before a halt was made, and the bandage removed from before his eyes, enabling him to note his surroundings.

The halt had been made in the interior of a large rocky cavern, in front of the narrow entrance to which was a level rocky plateau. Looking out of the entrance the prisoner could see nothing but blank space, and rightly concluded that the cave was near the top of a mountain, but just which one he had no way of learning.

The interior of the cavern which was furnished with furs, weapons and usual camp paraphernalia, was the retreat of Wyoming Bill and his desperate gang of renegade reds and white outlaws; but, alas! for the aforesaid band, they had lost their notorious chief.

Among those who surrounded him Wild Frank was not surprised to see the Harris brothers and Doc Deering. He had long suspected that they belonged to the outlaws; but, until now, had not been able to obtain any proof against them.

"Yes, this is our head-quarters," Jim Harris remarked, interpreting the meaning of the scout's glance around. "How d'ye like the looks of it? Reckon it don't look purty welcome, eh?"

"Out! he's no doubt glad to fall into such congenial company," the doctor chuckled.

"Better git him a Bible," Bob Harris sneered, "so that he kin begin ter learn how to say his prayers."

"You need not trouble yourself," Wild Frank retorted. "Ten to one you three ruffians will need to say your prayers before I will."

At this the outlaw laughed, loudly, and turned away.

The Indians then bound the scout's feet, and he was tossed upon a pile of skins in a dark corner of the cave, where he was left, no one coming near him, for hours.

Day dawn soon peeped in at the mouth of the cave, and he could see the red-skins congregated upon the plateau without, and also the white outlaws, and concluded that they were holding a pow-wow—probably concerning what disposition was to be made of their prisoner.

What would be the result?

To Wild Frank it was apparent that some horrible plan of torture would be devised, which would end in death, unless he was rescued. He had been a foe to the outlaw band for the past three years, such as it had known in no other person; his rifle having made wide gaps in their numbers.

He therefore well knew they would show him no mercy, but tax their ingenuity to devise some terrible punishment to inflict upon him.

That no one would come to his rescue he felt certain, for his two pardons were on their way to the military post, and there was no one else in the vicinity who would come in search of him.

The prospect was therefore anything but pleasant.

He was in the midst of contemplation of his situation when he felt a slight touch upon his back, and whirled around to find no one less than the Humming Bird near him.

"Sh! for your life, don't speak above a whisper!" she said, in a smothered tone. "I have managed to get here without attracting notice. Do you know what they propose to do with you, Wild Frank?"

"No more than that they threatened to roast me," the scout replied.

"Yes; that is just what they intend to do," the half-breed girl assured. "That is what they are even now holding the confab about, outside. You must escape now, if ever."

"That is impossible, I fear," with a dubious shake of his head. "I am bound and helpless, and unarmed."

"I will free you of your bonds," Humming Bird replied, producing a sharp knife, and severing the cords that bound his hands and feet. "Now take this knife, and watch your chance to make y-ur escape."

"But you— I came to rescue you, and cannot go back without you?"

"Do not risk your own safety on my account," the girl answered. "I have a better plan, which will work with less danger. Bob Harris threatens to give me my liberty, and take me back to the ranch, if I will consent to marry him as soon as we get there. I shall consent to this, and thus get back to my brother, and then denounce these ruffians."

"But, is this not risky? They may force you to keep your pledge."

"That they cannot do. Before they can make me, you can probably come and arrest them."

"If successful, in escaping, yes. It would be a triumph I would crave."

"Then, I will look for you. Sh! some one is coming. I must go. I may not see you again, here."

She glided away through a fissure in the rock, into some inner cave, and that was the last the scout saw of her, in the rendezvous.

The three outlaws now entered, and approached where Wild Frank still lay, as if bound and helpless. He had the knife concealed in the sleeve of his buckskin jacket, ready for instant

use, however, and was resolved to sell his life dearly.

"Well, we've held a meeting," Jim Harris said, folding his arms, "and the reds reckon as how they orter hev ye fer a roast. You've killed a heap of their brothers, and raised the devil, generally, and they allow they'd feel safer if you war evaporat-d in a cloud o' smoke. An' so, as we're under deep obligations to the aforesaid reds, we must read our hearts in sorrow and lose you, our loved one."

"I would I had a handkerchief to wipe away a silent tear," quoth Deering, with a mock snuffle.

"Or some cologne to alleviate the odor of roast jackass, presently," Bob Harris added.

"How long before the interesting ceremony is to commence, may I ask?" Wild Frank inquired, with the utmost composure.

"You'll be informed, as soon as we decide," Jim Harris answered, turning away, followed by his comrades.

"They returned in about an hour, however, and Bob Harris said:

"The fair Humming Bird has consented to become Mrs. Bob Harris, old Loy, so you see we've won everything. I start at once for mid-prairie, where the ceremony will be performed to-morrow eve, at six o'cl'ck, by the Reverend Doctor Deering, here. Part of the reds will keep us company. The remainder of 'em, and brother Jim will stay here, and to-morrow eve, at six o'clock, the fires will be lighted what is to burn ye up. We'd have a little victory dance down on the prairie in celebration of the event. Hal! hal! you'll be getting just comfortably warm, about the time we're getting hitched. I shall snuff the air, expecting to smell roast venison, up this way. Tal! tal! old long-hair. I wish you a warm and pleasant trip. Drop me a postal card, when you cross the line, and tell me how you like it."

"Perhaps you will hear from me again," Wild Frank suggested significantly.

CHAPTER XXIV. A TIMELY VICTORY.

WILD FRANK was now left to himself again and such unpleasant reflections as the nature of his situation would admit. To be sure, he had liberty of limb, thanks to the Humming Bird, but that fact entailed no certainty of his ultimate escape from the stronghold.

Still, he was more hopeful than before, and resolved to make a determined effort for his freedom, as soon as the proper time arrived.

Bob Harris and the Humming Bird, accompanied by Doc Deering and a dozen renegade red-skins, soon left the cave, en route for the prairie, where the ceremony was to take place.

After they had gone, and when the shades of night were creeping into the cave, Jim Harris brought a heavy blanket, and lay down between Wild Frank and the mouth of the cave.

"I'll keep ye company, as I reckon ye must be lonesome," he said, with a hoarse laugh. "How fur hev ye got y-ur pathway smoothed toward the 'other world, scout?"

"So far that I am not afraid to die, Jim Harris," was the calm reply. "You probably know that Wild Frank is not a coward, like you and your vagabond crew!"

"Waal, now, I ain't so sure about that just yet. I'll hev ter watch the flames tickle yer shins before I kin decide. I've hed ther pleasure of attendin' sesh picnics 'fore now when bigger fellers than you howled camp-meetin' tunes fer ther reds to dance by. By the way, what are ye goin' ter give us as ye go off the handle—Money Musk, or Virginia Reel?"

"If I were to be so lucky as to get free, I'd give you a tune you'd never recover from," the Buckskin Bravo replied.

"But ye won't git free. I'm goin' ter lay right here, my gay cavalier, and watch ther ye don't escape to-night. To-morrow I'll hand you over to Scar-Face and his reds to prepare for the stake. Hal! hal!"

"That's right—laugh while you feel like it," the scout said, with a terrible glitter in his eyes, "for you may never get another so good a chance."

The outlaw did not reply, but rolled himself in his blanket, preparatory for a nap, and it was but a short while ere his heavy breathing pronounced him to be asleep.

Then Wild Frank nerved himself for the task before him. All the reds were rolled in their blankets in another part of the cavern—Harris's body was the only obstacle between the scout and liberty!

Grasping his knife firmly in his right hand, he arose quickly and softly to his feet.

To his surprise Jim Harris did the very same

thing, and for the instant the two mortal enemies stood glaring at each other, neither making a single motion—offensive or defensive.

Till, with a faint hiss, the Buckskin Bravo leaped forward, with a lightning-like movement, and plunged the knife into the ruffian's breast, at the same time clutching his throat to prevent his raising an alarm. Dropping the knife he then supported Harris back to the ground, and held him there till his life ebbed out.

It was a terrible act, but after all, it was in the defense of life, and not a tithe as terrible as the plan Harris had formed for the scout's disposal.

Satisfied that Harris was dead, Wild Frank appropriated the outlaw's revolvers, and once more rose to his feet.

The silent encounter had not aroused any of the sleeping reds, and he stole cautiously toward the mouth of the cave, and soon succeeded in gaining the plateau, outside, and the free air of liberty.

"Now, then, to the rescue, again," he muttered. "The first thing is to get out of the mountains, and the next thing is to pick the trail of Bob Harris and his party. After that, leave it to me to step in and win the game."

A few more scenes will suffice to close our little life drama.

In the heart of a deep prairie morrte, where nature had left a little clearing, stood a group of people, at six o'clock the following day.

First noticeable, was Bob Harris, who held the Humming Bird beside him, evidently against her will, for she was crying bitterly. In front of them Deering stood with an open prayer-book, while the red-skins were squatting around the trio in a circle.

"Shet up yer sniveling!" Bob Harris was saying, "fer et won't do ye no good. Ye've got ter marry me now, an' here, an' ther sooner ther tetter. Ye needn't think ye kin git out of it, fer ye can't."

"I want to go to the ranch—I won't marry any one till I see my brother," Humming Bird tearfully protested.

"Ye goin' to do as I want—not as you want!" Harris growled, drawing and cocking a revolver, and placing it against the side of her head. "It's jest six o'clock now, and we'll proceed with the ceremony, knowin' that the flames even now begin to tickle the legs of Wild Frank! Hal! hal! revenge is sweet. I can even now smell his flesh scorching!"

"Monster!" Humming Bird gasped.

"Shet up!" her proposed spouse gruffly replied. "Jest ye mind what ther minister sez, an' answer as yer orter, or I'll pull ther trigger, and off goes yer head. Go ahead, doctor; let the funeral proceed."

Accordingly Deering proceeded to read from the book a marriage service, and soon came to the query passage, which he modified to suit the occasion:

"If thar's enny one present who has got any reason ter say why this marriage shall not take place, let him step forward and say so, or forever hereafter shet up!"

"And I step forward, here and now, to forbid the tanses!" Wild Frank cried, leaping forward into the glade, from the edge of the timber, followed by Laughing Len, Eagle Eye, and full two score of cavalymen. "Stand and deliver in the name of the law!"

The surprise was complete and overwhelming, and the Indians and two outlaws were secured in the same time it takes to tell it.

"Hal! hal! you smell my meat roasting, eh?" Wild Frank said, grimly confronting Bob Harris. "Why don't you and Deering shed a silent tear? You'll have plenty of time on your way to the post to join Wyoming Bill's tight-rope performance."

Taking Humming Bird, Wild Frank soon after set out for Papanauah's, while the soldiers went into camp, until the morrow, when a raid was to be made on the outlaws' stronghold.

On his way to the ranch, the scout related to Humming Bird how he had escaped, and, as luck would have it, had fallen in with the cavalry, who were on the way to the hills to rout out the outlaws. Len and Eagle Eye had also met them, and sending the outlaw chief on to the front in charge of a posse of soldiers, had come back to help take the rendezvous.

CHAPTER XXV.

MT. MOREY'S PARTING THRUST—CONCLUSION.
ARRIVING at the ranch with Humming Bird, Wild Frank found Sir Ralph and Lady Revel already there, and Lord Mt. Morey and his associates gone.

The villainous nobleman had sloped shortly before Revere's arrival, having evidently got wind of his coming, and concluded not to tempt death by remaining to meet one whom he had so deeply wronged. Sick and his valet had also gone.

The English lawyer had also departed, having adjusted the business and settled the fortune upon Lady Lillian, whom Sir Ralph had recognized as his own child.

Finding everything all working well, Wild Frank took leave early in the morning, to join the raid upon the mountain stronghold, promising to be back within a week when it was arranged that he and Lady Lily should be wedded, and also at the same time, Jack de Herne and Harriette Bird.

The attack upon the rendezvous was successfully made, one night later, and all the Indians either killed or captured.

Thus ended the existence of one of the worst bands of outlaws that ever infested the wilds of Wyoming—a band not the creation of fiction, but ruffians of life and reality.

At the conclusion of the raid, Wild Frank and his party returned to Papanau's, where the Buckskin Bravo received one of the hardest blows of his life.

Lady Lily had disappeared, and not a trace could be found of her.

All that the Reveres knew about the matter, was explained in a letter which she had left behind, addressed to the scout.

It read as follows:

"WILD FRANK: When you get this I shall be far from here, dead. I have found out the deceit that has been practiced on me. Mr. Morey has sent me a taunting letter telling me that I am not the child of the Reveres, but the daughter of a rum-drinking old match-woman in London. God forbid, now, that I should ever have lived to love and be loved, when my low birth place is an eternal barrier between us. Good-by, love! May we meet to know one another in the next world."

"Your betrothed—in death,
"LILLY."

With the keenest anguish the Buckskin Bravo read this, and for days, weeks—ay, even months he scoured the prairies in search of his lost darling, but never found her. Then he plunged deeper into the wilderness as guide of the United States exploring and surveying expedition, a man with life embittered—with affection seared by Death's grim hand.

Several years have passed since that memorable season, and time deals gently with the Buckskin Bravo, and not a month goes by that is not indelibly stamped with some startling scene of his wild career.

The Reveres returned to England; Jack de Herne married Harriette Bird and still lives at Papanau's; Wyoming Bill and his party were taken from jail and lynched without any trial; Mr. Morey and his crew were never after heard from; at this writing Laughlin Lou and Eagle are up in North Montana trapping; Wild Frank lies sick in Kansas City, Mo.—and here we lay our pen in its bracket, light our sanctum pipe, and bid our friends *au revoir*.

THE END.

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